

THE WELSH SONATA

NOVELS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE FURYS

STOKER BUSH

THE MAELSTROM

HOLLOW SEA

OUR TIME IS GONE

NO DIRECTIONS

SAILOR'S SONG

WHAT FARRAR SAW

WINTER SONG

THE CLOSED HARBOUR

THE WELSH SONATA

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

BY

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*Remembering the Child
at Llanguwm*

I

Report of Goronwy Jones, Station House, Cilgyn, Policeman and retired bard. (Written in his own time).

* * *

The window of my house is dead centred in this street, which is a tiny little place and might be called Fairy Street and not West View. And from it I can see anything usual that goes on in Cilgyn, and anything unusual for that matter. Also West View is one straight line in what you might call a perfectly round village. Now I did see something unusual this day, and it was that Mervyn Roberts going by, and too early for him. Eight o'clock it was, and the moon just scuttering off after a rollicking night, and I think it may take some things with it. Now Mervyn Roberts shows the world a pair of locked cars and a tightly stitched up mouth, that kind of man. Never really knew he was there until he was blocking my view of The Mill and The Goat, which is the pub at the corner of this street, and the Chapel is at the other. And if you turned them face to face they couldn't glare any harder than they do now, being the forces of good and evil in hard physical shape. So I went outside to see this Mervyn man. Spoke to him.

What was his five foot six of man doing out in the Cilgyn air at such an hour of the morning? Not usual with him (I

have a map in my head of all the lives in this place ever since I came away from that Bagillt place where my mother lived correctly in a fussy villa name of Cartref).

'Well?' I said to him.

And he said he was on his way to see that old Betsy Ty Gwyn, she was taken bad in the night. I said I was sorry, but he didn't say anything to that. I watched his ears, and his mouth never opened very wide, words coming through his teeth. But he did ask me if I had noticed anything unusual lately, and I said no. His mouth opened, nothing came out, and then it shut again. I looked down the street.

Not even any alteration in the landscape, or the look of the village? And hadn't I a sense of something in the air?

I never liked riddles. I like everything plain and correct, you can leave obliqueness to the bards who are still in action. So I said what did he mean? Then he said that the man with the cloud of hair on his head had gone.

Gone?

It shook me.

Gone.

Gone where?

Just gone. No more than that.

And I had to admit that I hadn't noticed it, not even with my policeman's eyes, and I felt as if I had my boots on the wrong feet. I queried again. Gone?

He guffawed.

He said it was strange that I hadn't noticed. Wasn't my window the brightest, the most alert in the whole street?

He had me there.

'There is a man as close to this place as he is to his own skin and you haven't even noticed that he's missing?'

I said again that I hadn't, and he guffawed at that, too.

He was close to my ear now, and saying that even the barn doors he used to lean against, and even the hay he used to lie in, would notice he wasn't there any more.

The one they call Rhys The Wound from Cynant way?

Mervyn Roberts nodded. As I say he is a man of few words, and even now he was wanting to be off, and I wasn't for stopping him either, so I let him go, and then I was running after him, and pulling on his arm.

When was he last seen?

Following his own shadow past Sion House.

I let him go on, and I went back into my house. And I sat down, and I thought about it.

Now this was sad, for here was a much loved man gone out of Cilgyn and no reason at all for his going, unless — . And I was still thinking hard about it when I saw that Mervyn Roberts taking his way back from Ty Gwyn up to his holding (highest in this place). So I drew up the window and called out to him how long had he been missing.

'Since bell-ringing time Sunday evening'.

And he went on.

And now it's Tuesday. Two whole days. Strange indeed. And when I say strange, it's because I know that Rhys man very close indeed.

Now a man is free to do as he wills, and if he is in a free country, then I suppose he is free enough to let his hair grow on his head until it's just a lovely cloud. But there's a reason for it, I have no doubt. And many a time I've seen the cloud moving about this place, and I often wondered what lay under it, and what behind it. And now that he is missing, I will find out. But first I better get down on paper all such as is known about him. And when it's done we'll have to arrange a search.

* * *

Missing since bell-ringing time on Sunday. Rhys The Wound, with the cloud upon his head. Not seen in Cilgyn since that hour, which is strange, since none in this place would offend him and none send him out of it.

Seen by Mervyn Roberts as he passed by Sion House, but no further than that, and since vanished, and God help him wherever he is.

Age. Unknown.

But never mattered with this man at all, and that was truly right. Height. All of six feet two inches and more stretched, and once seen all out and stretching upwards when he piled hay in Jones' barn, and that Jones remarked he had the certain look of seven feet.

Roman nose.

Musician's ears.

Scholar's brow.

Jim Driscoll's chin.

Eyes Rossetti might have liked on the end of his brush.

Light grey and the whites as clear as water.

Added together this gives him the right to look like a prophet, and I once heard a woman say that he really was, and walked out of a living page of the Book.

And I heard one say that though he has the certain look of a man about him, he may carry a child within him. But that is not strictly my business.

No parents.

No known or living relatives, according to some, but many to others.

Never seen inside houses or cottages, or sheltering behind great gates.

At a late hour on some nights was known to have been treated with kindness and with ale by some who broke the law.

Is given to kneeling at odd hours of the day or night in the place where he happens to be staying.

Is respected by men.

And that Hugh Williams, Sion House says that he is the most God-drawn and most God-following man in this place. That is theological, and a way of looking at it, but strictly not my business.

My business is to find what is missing, and quickly, and to know the reason for it, if any, and against many things I have to match him.

Reputed to have come out of the House of Stone, Cynant way, some years back, and was strange in Cilgyn but accepted by it.

Not questioned by men and accepted by all.

None asked where lay his mother's bones, or his father's, or was curious about any of his blood.

Remember a time when he was watched by men in fields, since this Rhys would flit about like a shadow, come and go again, like the Hawk moth.

Never in the same place for more than three hours of a clock.

Men said that his spirit drove him, and that he moved about on legs as lively and bouncing as a springing hound.

And again and again was closely watched by some men at first, for though many women in this place are old, and some hag-ridden, yet were others maidenly watching him, their great silent eyes stroking at his manhood.

Perhaps sometimes as they were dreaming they were close to this Rhys, and the world breaking where they lay.

* * *

A number of things I recall.

Seen by that Idris Pen y Parc lying under the great rock by Penllwyn. And by that child Bronwen and laughed at by her because he was kneeling hard in the lane close by old Betsy Ty Gwyn's cottage. And once indeed by that Caradoc Hughes Hengoed, but only the head rising above a hedge on a blind and blowing night back of Morris's Pentre Bach, and said his hair was looking like the foam of the sea. Seen erect and dignified by Job Richards, Ty Issa, passing by louts who called out to him, 'get your bloody hair cut, mister'. And by that Taid Hedger and Ditcher, hurrying him down The Fox's Ride, and God's word lashed upon his back. Once by that Mervyn Llys Fawr, and standing outside Two Gates, and so grave and still that that Mervyn tip-toed him by.

And once by Mari Ty Newdd, flat and stretched and abandoned on a summer's day and thought him nailed to the ground.

And once under Glan Ccirw's highest hedge by that Gwenllian Humphreys as she gathered sticks, and deep asleep, and she cried to herself that though he was sleeping hard his prophet's fingers were not still.

Seen heavy and drunken under the table at The Mill and The Goat, and guarded with kindness by that Huw Ellis because of the memories of his drunken father.

And seen by some silent ones in Cilgyn as dervish and devil and curled squirrel, and the tallest man God made, at various seasons of the year.

Seen frozen and stiff and very quiet within the threshold of the Mean One's greatest barn, that is English, and foreign to this place that is Welsh.

And in the middle of a broad field on a spring morning, sitting laughing with a bundle of old Christmas cards on

his knee, reading the names upon them, and suppose he found them after the happiest hour was over.

And heard crying out the nineteenth psalm on a very quiet night, but only the once, he being bitten badly by Bryn Derwen's dog.

And once seen held and crippled by his own height as he was trying to get into a doorway of John Evan's cottage, which is only big enough for fairies, they say, and that may well be true.

* * *

I can remember his strength.

He was as powerful as two lions with jaws locked hard upon the same bone and each pulling his way.

And stronger than the steel of Huw Ellis's great wheel held fast and bound on the tenth of March, and any movement sealed by ice and fire of the air on that hardest day.

Strength of a man who one day seized Lewis's bull by the horns, and in his anger twisted and broke its neck, and that man was Rhys The Wound and the Cloud.

The strength of ten men pulling on a rope, and the strength of the Davies black pulling a harrow over deep plough.

And some said he carried the strength of an angel, but this would come by his mother's and not his father's bone.

The strength of a stubborn ass and a stubborn child.

The strength of God upon his back and that is true enough.

And strength in neck and back and loin and breast, and in long fingers, that one day held them tight against Taid Hedger's throat, and was the only day he ever soiled his soul.

Strength of the devil, too, they say, but that would come out of Huw Ellis's ale.

* * *

I speculate upon the reasons for his going.

Loss of his memory perhaps, it was never much, they said.
Tired of his life, and for a reason none may know, perhaps
dare not find out.

Or a sudden sight of that Stone House, Cynant way, seen
by the light of his own brain, and his mother's chair, and
her there, and all the bareness of the world about her.

Or a shame breaking out like fever at the thought of his
drunken father stood like black shadow over his mother,
and Rhys held fast in iron bands of his own horror.

Or from the weight of a blow that struck him hard that
day sailor Parry went off with Rhys's woman to Swansea bay.
From the sight of that cloud upon his head, seen in Ellis
Grocer's brightest mirror and asking himself if it was foolish
or mad perhaps.

Or a memory of the first day of blood, and life brutal as his
own hand.

Or perhaps the sudden loss of his great haven, being that
rock above Penllwyn, that sheltered his bone and shadow
of it, now rolled down to a flat field by reason of a terrible
storm.

Or a sudden resentment at being called tramp in this place
by the owner of the great barns, who is English and dare
not be Welsh.

Or the memory of children played with and now far from
childhood, and perhaps wondering if everything doesn't
have an end after all.

Or some warning to his free and roving spirit to turn his
mind's map down and dive boldly for another country.

Or a feeling he might kill the kindness in that Huw Ellis,
shot up like fountains in that man, and a decision of no
more visits to that house.

Or a thought of years bending him down and long since he walked far back to Cynant where lie buried his mother's bones.

Wanting to kneel there, the thought shaping his steps and perhaps the reason he was seen hurrying past that Sion House.

Or maybe he himself cried 'time to go' when that smart towny woman from England came to Cilgyn, and lately divorced, and stared hard at his shirtless back and the fine eyes that never answered to her own fire.

Or by God! . . . and the thought is sudden and it saddens me; that Rhys might have been struck at by his own death.

* * *

I think of the manner of it striking him.

By reason of him slipping at some great height, and falling then sadly to his own end.

By a dream setting sail in his own mind and no known course, and a bright battering bus in a Saturday town that cannot swerve and his eye blind.

Or lying buried in water and as cold as a whale by reason of a fixed plan.

Or again, just like his mother, mouse quiet and sudden, which was by the heart's action and is simplest, and the loved Book snug to his own knee.

Or by clutching at shadow and some warmth in the Mean One's barn, found cold, and that man's daughter saying un-excitedly, 'the tramp is dead'.

Perhaps by sudden news of that Sailor Parry drowned in a far sea, and Rhys's woman back in the bright town, the swirl of blood to his brain at sight of her, whore now, and laughing with laughing men.

Or God's justice to him under Morris's privet on a dark morning, and found by lamps, folded in a child's peace.

Or as I have said, by the action of his own hand; though God forbid.

Perhaps by a high stride and climb against his will to the top of Owen's quarry and a sudden dizziness looking down, and pressed hard by memory of his father falling down there with a great drunken thump on a hard and blustering night. A sudden command from his father's bone, and Rhys must follow. Or like the turning of a leaf by a total collapse of his own spirit.

Perhaps bent far back and neck broken by louts in the last hours of a drunken town, and two whores laughing at his hair.

Or by some extreme sadness that fashioned him his own rope.

God help poor Rhys, I hope he hasn't done it.

Or died alone out of this land which is Welsh, and is his home.

* * *

The hour that christened him has grown in my brain. Called Rhys The Wound by reason of a blow that he took when he was young and fiery, when his woman run off with a sailor named Parry to Swansea town. The blow that struck him was deep, and they say that the wound bled. Wound delivered to him by the mouth of that Selwyn The Briach as he was sitting in Tym the barber's chair. I can hear it struck.

'That God forsaken Olwen Hughes has gone off with the sailor Parry to Swansea Bay' that Selwyn said.

And the wound was home.

Home by two movements of Rhys's body.

A leap out of his chair and a cry of God! And a sudden falling down to that floor by the weight of the sickest spirit. It was from that moment that the wound bled.

That Selwyn said, 'Poor Rhys', but he said nothing.

And Tym the barber the same.

'Leave it then, Christ leave it' that Rhys cried out, and from that day it grew, and went on growing they say, and no barber could cut his hair again, and Rhys's thought and word were steel.

And so it grew and grew.

And soon was mane and soon was cloud upon his head.

And that is how it was.

* * *

By many he was called good, and that by reason of a holiness in his mother, who taught him how to hold that great book, and how to read it, and how to love it, and that was most important.

It was from the day she left him, and his first day in the world as a lost child.

Called fine also and that by reason of a certain grace in him.

And uncle by children, and that by reason of his nature.

And drunken by some, and that was when he had the devil in him.

And 'child' by that Hugh Williams Sion House, and that is true enough.

And loafer by a Lancashire man in a foreign country, but what else can you expect?

And bastard by the first woman that ever saw him who didn't know at that time that flowed in her the whore's blood.

And called the dunce son of Meirion, Hēwer of stone.
And the laziest man in this place by a great scar-faced farmer
who is a millionaire.
And sad by Pritchard the chemist.
And Samson by that Mervyn Roadman the day he was
held down by a great chain.
And 'truly Welsh' because he never could speak English.
Called Simon's brother.
And John the Baptist's shadow.
And Father Christmas by a dwarf's son.

* * *

How he will look to others.
A tall man with a cloud of silver upon his head.
No man's shirt has ever graced his breast.
And just any old sack flung, cape-like about his shoulders
that some farmer does not want, or any old rag fallen from
a tree.
Warrior's trousers from old wars and never was any different
except once when Hugh William's black ones were too
short for his long legs.
Wears any old boots at all, and on a summer's day,
nothing.
Can be seen at a distance by the living cloud of his hair, and
by glimpses under a moving sack of the shining gold of
his chest.
And can sometimes be located in the dark of night by a
soft singing out of his mouth, and by some prayers that are
as soft as water.
Or by a black shadow ten times his own length spanning a
lane by reason of a full moon.
Or by an erect body, and mute and still against a cold

hedge as though listening and waiting for a word, and seen by men passing and none disturbing him.

* * *

I remember what I saw with my own eyes.
That summer's morning and close to nine of the clock and I come upon him sat under a great elm and rolling to and fro in his hard palm the tit's egg that held in it the joy of the world, for that Rhys and a staring child.
I remember now the wrists of steel.
The look in his eye measured an early dream, now frozen under the bone.
And that scholar's brow, and it shows how nature clown'd him.
With his woman's fingers that could hold up breast or child.
And the feet that might have belonged to any old Arab in the world.
And the mouth, that was hard and soft at the same time.
And the lines upon his face that might be drawn by knives, or received on a journey to a secret country, and the journey back more terrible than that begun.
Never harmed a man in this place, so God grant he is not dead by any of the several deaths that gripped my mind.
And if only lost, that he will be found.
Let hope spread out like arms and not lie hidden like fangs.

* * *

I will name those who will search for him.
Huw Ellis The Mill and The Goat, watcher and witness of Cilgyn.
Old John from Llys Fawr who will forget his rheumatics for a single day and loan us his eagle eye.

That Ifor, visiting bard from Barry, who was never once lost in the forest of his tongue.

And Olfyr the dwarf's son, who knows every in and out and up and down in the wood by The Wern, and sometimes what lies under the rotting bracken.

Hugh Williams Sion House of course, much worried by absence of his 'child'.

That Mervyn Roberts, top holding, who can soften at least for a day.

And Saul Powell who once got the mystery of the driven Christ from that Rhys The Wound.

Morris, Engine driver, will turn himself away from his bed for the six hours he should be in it.

Geraint and his brother Islwyn, and his sister Arianwen, who used to play Cowboys and Indians with that Rhys The Wound.

And Melvyn's Boy Scout son, with his needle eye, whose old grandmother sometimes used to cry out to Rhys on a lonely night, 'man! give me your tongue.'

And that roadman who has the feel of all the place about him.

And Vaughan The Post who knows the back and crack of every lane we hold.

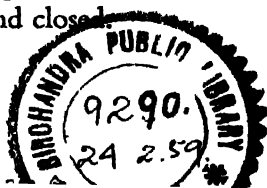
Even that Evans, Council man, who is such a master of his syntax, but no control of his own tongue, poor man.

And that Evans Insurance will help also, though Rhys is not insured with him and that I know.

And the children off in *all* directions when the school is closed and they were closer to Rhys The Wound than any man.

* * *

The searchers, ransacking, will spread out and circle this place like the fan that is opened and closed.



Hugh Williams to climb high above Penllwyn and search him all about that Rhys's favourite place, dead centred by the hole where once rock was, and now fallen to a flat field. Once he prayed there that the rains would come.

The Boy Scout and the dwarf's son in that area where lie the Mean One's greatest barns, not liking Welsh about their place, and those children are hard to catch.

Saul Powell and old Eagle Eye for the area bounded by Glan Ceirw's scurvy acres.

And a man who now prefers dead water to living will search the extreme edges of the place.

Davies will climb up boldly in the direction of the Briach and come down again by the Field of Fire.

A message to be sent to Dr Williams, and taken by Arianwen, informing him that the search is on.

And arrangements for a signal is found alive, and another if found dead, though God forbid.

It will be the shout Found and the shout Lost.

By arrangement a loud whistle from my son Saul.

And a loud ringing from The Post's bicycle bell.

A signal of loss or gain by sight of a running child from the Mean One's barns.

And an all out screech from Evans Insurance's motor-cycle.

Now luck to every man and let us have him home.

I shut my book then, and I got up, and went to the window.

And I watched and I waited.

* * *

I heard the sound of feet and I knew the men were coming, and first there was that roadman. He has a kind face, and only his boots have an ugly look. And I went outside.

'Well done indeed, boys' I shouted, and now they were assembling.

I counted and none were absent.

I watched their feet strike sparks from the stones as they crowded down.

'Let us get going' they cried.

So they went their ways, and I eyed each man, testing him, and each limb was heavier by a heavier heart.

The eyes of women watched us go our ways, and they sent prayers after us. Only the children were silent. The whole life of Cilgyn was silent in a single hour. And the morning grew.

And the day grew fast and the night came down.

Not found.

And the heavy men came down the hill and mountain and the light from their swinging lamps splashed upon the darkness like water.

And they were silent men. The last cries and the last shouts had shaken through the valley, and the echoes of some were yet confounding.

Not found.

'Not found' cried Ellis The Mill and The Goat, and he broke his wife's sleep and he dressed himself. Then he went off down bare wooden stairs to the loud crow of the best cock he had ever had.

And he lighted the fire. As the flames grew and the kettle began to sing he thought he heard near to him the echo of the loudest shout, and it was full of mystery.

Not found. Strange indeed.

Rhys of the wound and the cloud upon his head.

And the kettle was boiled and the tea made, and the wife came down.

'Not found then?' Olwen said, and her husband clutched tight at his cup, and for a while was silent.

'Not found' Huw Ellis said. 'That lovely man! And if not found ever, then by God I will remember the great weight

of his shoulder on my hard wheel on a freezing day.'

'Poor old dear' Olwen said, and took her tea.

'Not old, woman, and never was' Huw Ellis said, and he rose and stamped his way out, and in the cold morning air he looked upon his house and his mill and his little farm. It lay so close to the mountain that he saw the living veins as the streaming rain came down.

'Where is that man? Where has he gone?'

Megan's husband with the bird's face, and the King's mail fast in a tight hand, came passing by, and he looked at The Mill and The Goat, and there was Ellis, owner, standing there.

Words were perilous on Ellis's tongue, and he looked at the carrier of the letters, and at his shiny cap. And the bird's face moved, and so he knew that Rhys had not been found.

'Mystery' the temporary postman said, and went his way.

Ellis said nothing, for the words had frozen, and he tramped his way back and violently into his pub's parlour, and there he sat. Legs sprawled, hands tight to his hips, and staring hard at the bench where Rhys The Wound had sat. Rhys who would come into the smoke, and the light and men's loud talk, and God's word fast upon his back.

'My father knew his father down Cynant way.'

The clock ticked on, and he was still sat, and still staring.

Olwen called in from the kitchen.

'Huw, here is that Mr Hugh Williams Sion House.'

'Come you in Mr Hugh Williams, come you in, sir. Welcome'.

And he came in, small and round, and in his well worn black, and Ellis thought how all of that suit had now gone and nothing left but its shine.

'Any news?'

'Not found' Hugh Williams said.

'Well indeed!'

'Now I must get me to some breakfast. So long have I been searching above Penllwyn that I have forgotten the time.'

'My father knew his father down Cynant way.'

'That I know, Huw Ellis' said Mr Hugh Williams, 'good-day to you,' and because this man was minister, Huw got up, and followed him to his door.

'Wherever he is' Hugh Williams said, 'let God embrace him with a kiss.'

'Day to you, Mr Hugh Williams, sir.'

And Huw Ellis walked back to his pub's parlour. The glasses of the night before were still unwashed, and the heavy night airs had wiped the shine from many a bottle, and Ellis noticed this, and noticed, too, the shameless damp patch upon his Eastern wall. Sad indeed that that man could not be found, crowned king in Cwlgyn by many a child. Sad indeed. And all the while Rhy The Wound was growing in his brain.

Heavy feet dragged past The Mill and The Goat, and he heard a woman call, and a cry came back.

Not found.

Huw Ellis got up and went to wash the glasses and to tidy up his place.

'I would have searched for him the livelong night.'

* * *

Huw Ellis had climbed the hill that on a summer's day is called the Hill of Fire, by reason of the great weight of gorse there. And half way up he looked at his watch and it was near to five o'clock of that day. And he knew that earnestness and hide stride were broken by the law of the land,

and slowly he had turned and wended his way down, for he must throw open to the world the great brown doors of The Mill and The Goat. As he dragged down he thought, he felt the very pulse of the air, and it moved with his mood, and he thought heavily of what might come. And he remembered Goronwy's face and he saw the picture clear in his mind. The men talking outside Station House's bright window, and there at once was the pattern before him, and the shape of that longest 'day' builded out of their very words.

Old John Loys Fawr had shut an inner eye on his rheumatics, and he had cried out in his kitchen, 'where is my stick, give me my stick', and they had given it to him, and he had walked slowly down to Goronwy Jones's place.

And the visiting bard from Barry had sung his way from his lodging, all the way to Station House, and it was a sad song, sung low in his throat.

And that Mervyn Roberts had growled loudly all the way down from his holding, yet loving the one who was lost.

And Geraint and Islwyn and Arianwen were waiting behind the school wall, and everywhere they looked there was that Rhys man whistling to them through his fingers and the Cowboys on their guard.

And Morris, Engine driver, had balanced perilously on the precipice of his own promise, yawned, and his missus had cried out, 'Hurry, man, hurry, they are waiting for you,' and again he yawned. Then she said she supposed when he retired next week his mates would give him a nice oak clock from Wrexham, and she said 'what madness that is, all railway people's houses must be full of madly ticking clocks. Go man, go' she cried, and Morris went off, and he was still yawning.

And Mervyn, Roadman, had packed him a real pipeful, rare with him, not smoking much, but this might be a hard day, longest he had known.

And the son of The Post had been skin close to a Freisian and wondering when she'd drop it, and had shouted, 'watch her, around noon I think,' and then he had ridden quickly to the Station House on his bicycle.

Ifor's daughter was cleaning the windows when she saw that Evans Council go strutting past and she cried out was he going to a wedding with that new collar and tie on him, but he said nothing.

'And so we all went off and we searched the whole place for him' said Huw Ellis to himself, 'but he was not found.'

And that Hugh Williams, Sion House, was walking gravely along from his place to the Station House, and he was carrying a letter and when he reached the post box he had *hurled* it in, being so angry at a Bishop's letter to him, but he soon forgot that, and thought of another trouble.

And the Mean Ones were at their breakfast behind the great barns, and the head of them was reading from *The Times* that the shares were down by nearly two and a half per cent, and he said, (for a bright child was near to his window then), 'what's all this about . lost tramp?'

But just then Evans Insurance had roared by on his motorcycle and drowned them all with noise.

So Huw Ellis saw it all as he came back to his pub, and he left the others still looking for Rhys, and it was how, one after another, Cilgyn yielded up its males, and all its children, and they met outside Goronwy's house. And how grave that Policeman looked when he came out to them, graver than that Hugh Williams Sion House, yet full of authority.

And then Huw Ellis was back and staring down the Fairy Street. Not a sound, not a stir.

‘When men have gone away you may see clearly what they have left behind them.’

And Huw Ellis went on looking at all the bareness and the emptiness. Cilgyn was as still as a cold stone, and the silence as deep as a pool. And all the doors were shut as though to keep this silence out.

Life stirred only in the area of the great barns where the day of the loss of Rhys was like any other day, and the world still round.

‘And not a bit of smoke from my place’ thought Huw Ellis, still standing at the top of this street. And he looked at his own house, and there was that gable still looking like a fist.

Shut too, was the door of Chapel, and looked so sealed and tight you would swear that this very day they had locked God out.

* * *

And the forge a black heap, nor sight of man or hoof.

And that Freisian lying very flat, sicker by lack of a man’s hand, and the sound of that man’s voice.

Even the silence is measured by that Sion House cat, for you can hear it walk, and that is rare enough.

And by accident or design a blind down in that Talfan’s back bedroom, and it does not look too good.

‘A day of terrible long shadows’, thought Huw, still stood outside The Mill and The Goat.

And a very fast car right past him and down Cilgyn’s one street, and perhaps its driver wondering if he passes through the area of death.

And a suddenly barking dog that echoes the mountain round.

And the tops, and the deeps, and the holes, and the corners, and the woods, and the quarry, and the areas of the streams, and the barns, and the stables, yielding nothing, not even that Rhys's shadow, though ransacked by soundless men.

Hugh Ellis was just going into his pub when he heard a door open in Rose Cottage, and there was that Iolo's mother coming down and talking to herself as she always does, and she was carrying a bright yellow jug in an old fist, and when she got to his door, she spoke.

'Not found then?'

'Not found yet' Huw said.

'What is it? The ale as usual, I suppose', and he went inside and she followed him, and leaned hard to his counter, and watched him measure the ale with a sharp eye, for her husband was so fond of every drop.

'He must have gone a long way off then' Iolo's mother said.

'He must.'

'May have got him drunk in a foreign pub over the Border, it's not the first time, is it? And then laughed under the table by the English.'

'I wonder.'

'I was wonderin' myself about that poor creature last night, if something may have hit him hard and maybe rocked him sane.'

'Why missus, was that Rhys that mad?'

'I think so, mister.'

'Then how long mad, by your own reckoning?'

'From the day that Merion his father struck him to the stone floor. Under seven at the time, they say, maybe hit him on his brain.'

Huw Ellis handed her her jug, full to the brim of ale.

'Didn't hit the vital part of him though, I think,' Huw Ellis said. 'How well he used to play with our children, missus, and I seen him do it many a time, that's not mad, is it? And look how good he was with his religion and the book on his back all the time as his mother wished, and was like his old grandfather Cynant way. You don't suppose God would have made him cracked then? What nonsense you sometimes talk, missus. Just like that stuff that flows out of your window of a night-time. Moscow always has its mouth wide open on your wireless. One night I'll walk into Rose Cottage and shut its mouth. People complaining at the noise'.

'I'm tearing at Iolo about it all the time, it's that Balalaika stuff from the Russian land, he always wants to hear it.'

'But you do sometimes talk rubbish, missus' Huw said, 'your son soiling the air here with his bad tales. That Rhys was a pious man.'

'I'll give you that, mister, it's true enough, for one night I saw him very brave indeed in the name of Christ, and if you saw it, Huw Ellis, you wouldn't forget it in a long day.'

'Strange! Now when was that? Why this place called Cilgyn is so close and tight and welded together that I think the only thing anybody doesn't know in Cilgyn is what doesn't happen. And when was that?'

'That night they were electing the Deacons for the Chapel, that October night it was when Jonas Butcher biked himself into a straying cow and killed himself. It was on the same howling night, I know. I remember the line of cars outside that place. And I thought then, why can't Iolo be a deacon. They all has cars'.

'Don't wander, woman' Huw said.

'I'm not and I won't. I was standing by these cars and I was listening' to them in the Chapel when I saw that man from back of Rhos come up, him they called old Rationalist Jack, who won't ever be satisfied till he has God in a corner, and knows so many terrible words he must have the devil's dictionary in his back trousers pocket. Well he was there, too, and listenin'. And once I heard him shout them deacons are a pack of wolves. He's such a miserable Welshman that God would be like teeth at his belly. He stood there, spittin' where he was standin'. Along came that Mervyn Roberts and told him to stop his shoutin', but Rationalist Jack just grinned back at him. But Mervyn was fair enough for he took hold on him and pitched him clean into another's arms . . .

'Whose arms then, missus?'

'That Rhys, that Merrion's son.

'Well then?'

'He had him a sack round him at the time, and his hair blowin' upwards like smoke, and he was out of the Book that night, I swear. Still and silent Rhys was, and grave with it, the holiness on him like cloaks, and filthy dirty he was, too, been sleepin' him in an old barn, I reckon, the night before that one, and was the reason why he never went into the Chapel though he had the right to hear the deacons named. And then that Jack bawled out of him that God was an old eagle astride every man's neck, and peckin' away at his love and never tired of it, so greedy he is. And that Rhys raised him an arm that was like an iron bar and wet with the rain, and he lifted up that old Jack and flung him six feet over a hedge, and him never movin' an inch from where he stood. His head was high and he was still listenin' to the electings in the Chapel, through that cracked door.'

'His dad had the lion's strength in him, too. That hewer of stones *would*, missus, but he was also as hard as the stones he hewed and that's the living truth.'

'That Mervyn Roberts was tellin' me when he saw that Rhys walking past Sion House he had a far-a-way look in his eye and it is the last house in Cilgyn . . .'

'It is indeed. You are right sometimes, missus' Huw said.

'And a step past it and you're out of Cilgyn altogether.'

'That's true enough' Huw said, but now he wished she were gone.

All the day he had felt the silence of the place, and it was like a pain.

'Well ta-ta' she said.

'Good evening to you' Huw Ellis said.

And he banged shut his door to keep the silence out.

That Rhys The Wound was full grown now, and standing in his eye.

'My father knew him down Cynant way.'

Grown one winter's night, out of his drunken father and his sad mother. Shared the bread and the salt, the dripping and the pitch black tea. Followed his father's footsteps, his manhood greedy for him long before his time. Knifed a pig, slew lambs, worked the land with his father. Ran to school, and upon the wall saw the maps, and all the colours of the seas and oceans, and standing boldly at the master's head, the great shining globe of the world, and his child's eyes watched it move.

'I remember the very day that Ifor told me that.'

And Huw Ellis stood close at his window, and he listened and it was still silent. And from bar to kitchen he walked, and back again, and from room to room.

'Tonight this house is dead.'

He called loudly, 'hello there,' and the echo came back to him.

'Very dead indeed and not a man in sight.'

It was so quiet he heard the fairy tap upon his door.

'Come in.'

'No answer.'

Huw Ellis went and opened his door and there was the

oldest woman in all Cilgyn, be-shawled and seeming faceless in the falling light.

'Why, Mrs Vaughan!'

And he led her in.

'Sit down. Your husband home!'

'That hill near broke his heart, Huw Ellis, silly in that man, silly. Now give me the pint for him.'

'That I will indeed.'

'The whole place after that man and not a sound at all. What if he sleeps him off a drunken sleep? I mind one lasting three days.'

'Missus' Huw Ellis said, 'I think that man is dead.'

'Duw! Really, mister Ellis?'

'I do indeed.' Now here's your ale, Mrs Vaughan.'

'Diolch, mister,' and the jug vanished behind her shawl.

Huw Ellis leaned over the old woman.

'I flung him drunk more than once' Huw Ellis said, 'flung him under that very table, and he slept. No harm in him. If the ale went into him it was the child came out. That's how it was.'

'I saw him good, too, Huw Ellis' Mrs Vaughan said.

'All Cilgyn did.'

'A grown man when I first knew him. At my door he was and askin' tea. I gave it. Rags of trousers he had and the feet bare. No shirt to him, but a chest like gold, so brown it was. Like a prophet he was, his hair thick and high upon his head and fallin' down his neck. I asked him to come in, but he said, *no* – not that. But he would like the barn to sleep him in. He looked all right to me so I said 'have it, mister, have all my barn, 'cept don't disturb my pigs! and he didn't ncither, and he went away and that night he slept. Away he was before the cock crow and my best sack

to wrap around his' flesh. I hope they find him.'

'Off with you now, Mrs Vaughan, that John Llys Fawr will growl at you if you're late. Nos da.'

'Nps da' and she went out.

And no sooner was she gone than another was in, and he had come far, twelve miles beyond Cilgyn and walking every step of that hard road. And Huw Ellis knew him when he lit the lamp.

'Evenin'.'

'Evenin'.'

By the lamp's light Huw saw the white-dusted shoulders that marked his labour done. From Taid Ucha's place he was.

'Border' this man said.

'Here you are, Gruffydd' Huw said.

'Your John the Baptist slung his bloody hook' this man said.

'Your words are like the bloody stones you hew, Gruffydd.' And Gruffydd blew on the ale.

'It's the children that'll miss him', Huw Ellis said. 'Poor Rhys. I hope that Iolo's missus isn't right and he's gone off his head all of a sudden.

Gruffydd gave a great laugh out of him, and he said did that Rhys have any head to him at all, since his dad didn't, save what looked and felt like a block of wood, or what was meant for one.

'Not unkindly, you know, Ellis' Gruffydd said, 'but he was a duffer and so was his old dad. Wasn't I workin' with that Meirion when the Owen quarry was open? Course I was. And now I'm at that Prothero's place and it's less tough. Was me what knew him better than anybody, long before he made for Cilgyn with his madman's mane. Not much for the schoolin' that Rhys was, nor his dad. Hewer of

stones his dad was, and one hard blustering night he went down that quarry with a great hard drop below him, and the lad at home and as close to his mother as any flesh may get. Readin' to him she was from that big book. Holy she was, and as close to Him as His own breath. But after his dad was dead it was hard for Rhys. Ran from the school to the farm and the farm to the school, that's how it was, Huw Ellis. Then one day that Rhys come home and she was in her chair and Job was to her hand and she would read no more. Nothin' more than sticks left in that house, nothin'. One day he strapped that big book on his back and away he went.'

'Which was the way of his grandfather.'

And he went behind his counter and brought Gruffydd another Border and said that was on the house.

'Diolch. Iechyd da' Gruffydd said.

'You seem to know him and his bone' said Huw Ellis.

He turned and looked straight into the eyes of the hewer of stone.

'I did,' and he drank his ale.

'Was me what saw him take his bloody wound. Count of that one Hughes what run off to Swansea Bay with a sailor name of Parry. And Rhys all set up for marryin'. A fine man he was, finer than fine, spite of his wooden head. That's how that woman got him, count of his manhood, and she thought of nothin' from that moment but her own delights ...'

'And where was his, Gruffydd?'

'Buried in his gravity. It was that rake of a man from The Briach place that told him she'd gone and by God he took it hard. Walked out of that shop crying, 'leave my hair, Christ leave it', and it was from that day he let it grow and

grow, and everywhere he went they say he carried her bloody wound. The tale is as old as the ale you get in that Eagle pub.'

'But no harm in that man, and never was. God watch him' Huw said.

'Queer' Gruffydd said, 'a man can go, and a bloody rat live on.

Nos da, Huw Ellis.'

'Nos da.'

A man with hard, cold fists came into The Mill and The Goat and sat him down and asked for Royal Wrexham.

'Any news yet?'

'Not found' the man said, and he was from Arçsfa, back of Llys.

'And all the men are down?'

'All.'

'Excuse me, mister' Huw said and he went out.

A sound like a shot and Olwen was home.

'That you, Olwen?'

'I'm here.'

'Any news?'

'Not found.'

'Pity! Pity'

'And soon the snows will come.'

Olwen sat down. Huw made tea.

'Drawn you are, tired. Brave of you, Olwen, all that way up'

'I was passing that Iolo's place and his woman said what a fuss indeed about a man.'

'And truly right missus, for a man is a man. Just think of it. I walked this place tonight. Like a cathedral it was, empty, no men, and echoes, echoes. Now it is time to close her up.'

When he went back to his bar the man with the hard fists had gone his way. And Huw closed the great door of The Mill and The Goat and returned to Olwen.

'Bed' he said.

'That is it.'

'Wherever I walked today I saw that Rhys, and I was thinkin' on him. Happy he was in the town, and in the lane, and under any old hedge. Piled my hay for me many a time. King of the Odd job, really, wantin' nothin' save his bit of tea and the hay to lie in. Played Indians and Cowboys with the children, and he their laughin' child.'

'There is still tomorrow and he may yet be found.'

'I hope it.'

'That Bagillt Jones is excited like he had a murder case, keen on tracking that Rhys down and buildin' him up from the heels, all his life.'

'I'm going to bed, I'm tired' Olwen said.

'I'm comin' soon as I lock up.'

And that night she prayed, and so did Huw.

I got the measure of that House of Stone.
 I got the measure of that Rhys's place that hugged a cold
 mountain.

Bare.

And the first look an icicle in my eye.
 The solid, grim, grey block, and might be congealed to the
 earth that held it.

One room up.

One down.

Around it the earth and air and many a rock, great lumps
 the size of men, and I saw one as big as a ship, rocks every-
 where. Magnificently scattered long ago by something
 older than us, and I daresay there was many a bright dazzling
 colour to them on a sunny day.

Here is the land that was Rhys's and his father's.

Width and length of five graves and no more than that.

Bare.

Mean.

Not flat or even, nothing about flat or even.

And in this Cynant place God gave Rhys and his father the
 feet of goats. That's how they tackled many a path not
 made for normal feet. And in this place, and forever
 hugging a wall in the winter time, a poor dribbling cow
 that was as black as your hat, and must have been called the

poorest thing that ever stood on four legs, at least by those who own better down around that Penrhyndeudraeth, where they are kingly beasts.

And two clucking old hens and a cock.

And a dark kitchen and damp, and a great cupboard holding the bread, and salt, and the bacon, and the black tea, and Meirion's onions.

I found this place for I asked three men the way.

'That Meirion's place' I said, and to a bent man, who looked as if he had been *thrown* into his suit, and a mouth like a knife slit, and great hands.

'Him out of Llewynhuan?'

'The same. Describe his place.'

'I remember that Meirion, and I remember the peaks and cliffs and falls of his granite face, mister, and that face was right for Cynant. And they say that when one day the bright bloody sun reels towards us and burns the earth away, then the brazen sky above you will still stare at Cynant cold.'

'That cold?'

'Colder.'

'And where could it be colder?' I said.

'Say hell is an island, mister, and that kingdom ice and not fire, then if you took any solid chunk of it and flung it hard to the towering side of the mountain to be held there fast and forever, there, mister, that is Meirion's place.'

And I thanked him and he went his way.

'An old man climbed the hill and read his bible there' I said to another, and he was as round as a ball and just coming out of that Rowland's shop with a bright packet of shag in his hand, and he hopped my way, having left one foot on Prothero's stone ledge five years back.

'That Llewynhuan man's place. I knew it,' this one said.

'Yes' I said to him.

'And on the coldest day it was warmer outside his house than in.'

'Llawer o ddiolch.'

'Not a place like it in my day, and they say house and man were well met' said another, and he was the last to pass me on my way there.

'P'nawn da.'

'P'nawn da, mister' and then he cried, 'wait, mister, wait'.

I waited.

'Yma' he cried.

I came.

'I once looked into the window that they had in their kitchen, and it was smaller than the condemned cell one in that place somewhere beyond Wrexham—I forget the name.'

'Hurry. It's cold.'

'He was there, his shadow eight foot high on a wall. Black it was. A lad by his mother, huddling with her, and she readin' him of Calvar, and the wounds of Christ, and him sittin' there like a great dog, eatin' his raw onion, loved them, and the fire in his belly from the town. Him roarin', her prayin', and the lad like a green leaf. I heard her say to Rhys he must keep the book by him to save himself, and wherever he walked in the days to come he'd carry it with him in its leather thongs, and he said that he would.

'God's not the only one with the right to his back,' that Meirion cried then, and he meant it, mister, for there was the hardest man living in his day.'

'Thank you.'

'Welcome. Only ruins now, his place I mean, ruins.'

'I shall stare at it.'

'Good day, sir.'

'Good-day.'

And I watched him go his staggering, mysterious way, and if he had burrowed through a hole like a rabbit it would have meant little to me.

And I went on, always climbing, and I came to it, and I stared.

And as far as you could see, rock.

And as deep as you could feel, cold.

And colder than that again.

I lay on my back and I stared up at the sky.

And then stared down.

And around:

And everything hard and jagged and upthrusting and wild, and violent, and somehow I felt it only lately cooled.

Sun would come in by fractions, but the cold would sweep like the sea.

And you could cut the silence with knives, build and make walls of it, and great towering arches of it, and I stared and I went on staring.

After I had rested a while I walked over three hills as bare as skulls and then I was back on the long road for Cilgyn.

And at The Mill and The Goat I heard a Winter tale.
One word from me, and it brought others tumbling, and
that was 'childhood'.

Hadn't I just come back from that place of old bones?
And the childless plain?

And nine miles to the wooden place they called 'the
school'.

How would that Rhys play?

With the dribbling black cow?

Or with the rabbits, making junctions of the hills?

Or with his own shadow?

Or did his mother in the huddled corner tell him of others
playing?

Or did that giant, cold father leave him alone with the goats?

And I wondered at the colour of his hair.

I was still wondering on these things when that Huw Ellis
came from behind his counter, and he had a glass of ale in
his hand, and he sat down with us, and smiled, but not for
long, being serious then, for he told us that though this
man seemed truly lost, he had his childhood safely stored
away in his head, and he would speak of it.

And he did.

'Childhood' Huw Ellis said, 'so that Bagillt man wants to
know about that?'

Goronwy Jones said he was curious about it, since he came back over three hills from Cynant.

'My father knew his down that way, *and*, that Rhys' Huw said.

'He was a country child, mister Jones, and they say he first saw the light of day through a rabbit's ear.'

That Mervyn Roberts was there, and wonder of wonders, he opened his tight mouth.

'And you *can*, mister. And you can see daylight through worse than that. Think of them towns, the walls, *everywhere*.'

'Before he was months old that Rhys had his face in the earth' Huw Ellis said. 'That's algebra to the town, they don't know. Why I mind a Lancashire man here one day to try out the trout and he stood starn' a long time at that Gwenllian's little girl and he said, "funny, them country kids, mouths wide open all the time for catching flies and faces as round as an O". I was up then and on my toes, it was the silliest bloody thing that ever I heard a man say. And I said to him, "rounded by a bit of wonder, mister, and *you'll* never see it this side of the grave".'

'Hear hear. Well spoken,' and that was from the old man from Llys Fawr. 'English are stupid, I always said it.'

'Think of the town chuld sick with everything, and the country child happy with little. Stupid man that he was.'

And then Huw said it was a pity that Rhys hadn't had enough schooling, and he mentioned his father, that iron-fisted Meirion out of a place called Llewynhuan. Hewer of stones at the quarry, Huw said.

And that Bagillt man opened wide his eyes, for in Cilgyn that Huw Ellis can tell a tale. And Huw was into it.

'When his fists weren't close to the stones, then they

were generally hard up against another's flesh. That kind of man, and taken with the drink that was his God, fiery and dangerous, and hard, mister, hard, and I mean it. In the fire of drink or out of it his nature was the same, a man with no feelings at all. Flesh and bone and no more, and the one as damned as the other.

I had a place then myself, Cynant way, the Golden Fox. Better than this, but isn't that often the way of things? What you leave is better and what you come to worse. There's a reason in it, but that an argument that would take me well beyond closing time. Iechyd da, gentlemen.'

And Huw Ellis sipped at a glass of Border.

'Iechyd da' we said, and we, too, drank.

'They had a place that was small, and dark, and pokey. In a dark corner on a winter night that Rhys was born, the one of which I speak. Suckled often in the bare mountain air, and often the wind like knives, and his mother bold to it, and the child suckling in sweet innocence. As for her - born sad, misters.' Huw Ellis shrugged his shoulders. And then of a sudden he spat.

'When God caught him by the heels and he went over, a great drunken lump found cold at seven of the clock, why there was the man split open and his nature wide. No man ever missed him. God's justice, they said. Maybe it was. It's a way of looking at it.'

Goronwy Jones was off duty and out of his uniform, and he took another glass. And he was closely watching Huw, and by the look on that Ellis's face you knew there was something more to come, and it was coming out of him in a split second.

'Iechyd da.'

Five men did not answer and two women were silent, their eyes fixed on the man of The Mill and The Goat.

'Sad and kind and good living that woman of Meirion's, but oh! . . . as frail as a wren's leg. Always working, in and out in that stone house, and when she wasn't working, then sat mouse-quiet by a fire, and reading her big book. Chapel three times on Sundays, a long hard walk, and she did it, and young Rhys with her. His dad you would not move.

In those days, gentlemen, ale was as cheap as the labourer's hand, and he liked it, and what was fiery, anything with fire in it, and all his money he'd throw into the glasses that held it. Never a care about anything, never a thought about anybody but himself, and tossing it into him. And all that fire saved itself up secret inside him, and by God, in the end it took him down.'

The Frongoch man heard nothing. He's as deaf as a post. 'Well Huw Ellis?' said Goronwy.

And I could see he was alert and ready for it.

'Worked at the Owen quarry, then at the Piothero one, then back at Owen's to end his days. Hardly ever worked clean sober, mystery how he got it at his wage, and even if dead drunk amongst the stones on a tricky ledge he was yet as sure-footed as the devil.

At the day's end he was away, hardly ever in that house, and on Saturdays, pay day, away to the Saturday town. Many a dark night that child walked far to the noisy town, just to take hold of his drunken father and lead him home. Why man, I remember a Saturday night when I myself was there, and standing in that same place where Meirion was stood him between two laughing women, and singing away at the top of his voice.

Rhys would be around nine at the time, I reckon, and he'd come far to take home his dad. There was outside the door an old feller by the name of Howell, and he had a fiddle and that's how I first caught sight of the child. Duw! He could play that man. And the child still. Still as still as that man drew the great Messiah chords to the bow. And it struck me then watching Rhys, and also count of a thing or two I'd heard, that it was a pity that Meirion hadn't been a sensible man and had his child taught, for the music lifted him into another level of the air that night. Pity indeed. Strange it is to me that that nice quiet woman ever took up with him.

A violent man, misters. Born in violence, and might have dropped off the very tail-end of a thunderstorm. The child went into the noise and the light and he faced the laughing women. Believe it or not, he got his dad clean away from two circling arms and a dirty wet mouth. I was sorry for the child. So I come away then and I knew I had to do it. So I took hold on his dad and dragged him out and pitched him into the cart, and then I took Rhys up on the scat beside me and I gave that pony a belt and soon I had them back where they belonged. A candle in a cold dark kitchen, and her there, waiting. Sad as sad, misters, I hated the look of it. But to this day I remember the look on the child's face as the chords flowed to the bow.'

Job Richards came in for his old mother's tot, the drop of brandy and Huw served him and he went away.

And even Huw's pause had Go duffy's eye wide for the story of Rhys.

'No. That Meirion believed in nothing, under the sun or behind it. And the boy clung always fast for the mother, and who can blame him. And once she was telling that

young Rhys about how her old father used to sit his Sunday hours on the high hill reading, and quiet and peaceful there. And he heard her say it to him one night, and he turned and cursed them both. Biting into his bread he was, and his ale there to the table, making a great noise with his mouth, but he always did, and away he went to the top room to finish his supper.

Now that very next morning there was snow on the step, and combing the roof, and ice with it, and there had to be taken a good distance up the mountain the miserable bit of hay for the black thing that dribbled the milk. And it was that Rhys that carried it on his back, for that Meirion had once said that God was not the only one with the right to use it. And my father said that he went on up into the seas of snow and the terrible bale lashed to his back. Like a little horse he was, and Meirion flung back the mother what tried to hold him back. He cried to Rhys "Go" and he went. And I said to my father "is it really true?" and he said "yes, and was me that saw it, and I thought of Lewis's grandfather on his belly at Llay". For he had him a great belt with a shining buckle what used to belong to his old father and he swung it and he followed behind him. And the black creature came to the hay.'

And Huw Ellis paused again.

No sound in that pub parlour, it held the living breath.

'What then?' asked Goronwy Jones.

'Mrs Vaughan there' Huw cried, 'tell then, woman, your sister Mari was from that part.'

Still be-shawled she was, and lost in it, but now she came out of the folds and looked and blinked into the lamp's yellowy light. 'My husband it was. Come runnin' in to me, that time. "Call it a bloody riddle, missus", he said, "but I

was passin' that Meirion's place and in a black hole I heard a sound and it wasn't rats—"

"What was it then, Aled" I said.

"That Meirion's son. Sat him in a cold corner in that black hole and his dad's gun loaded up and cocked and waitin' for the touch and sittin' there between his little legs. I took it off him".

"Jesus" I said, and Aled forgive me for it.

"Where is he then?"

"White like a sheet and in his mother's arms" my husband said.

"Get the law Aled, get it" I said.

"No", he said, "let God take him and break him", and he was right'.

Huw came round the counter then and he sat by Mrs. Vaughan.

'Thank you, Mrs Vaughan, for there's a man that knows it now', and he looked at Goronwy sitting there.

'I would have broken his neck' Goronwy said, and even under that bad light you could see the anger there.

'No. He'd have broke yours, mister. Nos da now'.

Huw Ellis looked at Goronwy Jones.

'Put that in your report, Mr Jones' he said, and he said it quickly, and with what you might call two kinds of a voice, and it was like anger and kindness at the same time.

That Frongoch man got up, and Mrs Vaughan after him, and they said good-night and went out and then another woman, and again a man, and now only Huw Ellis and that Goronwy Jones.

'Time' Huw Ellis said.

But he came round and he said to Jones, 'Just to finish it off', and they had two halves of Border.

And the glasses were cold to the hand for now the night was down.

'Nos da, Mr Ellis' Goronwy said.

'Nos da' Huw said. 'Think of Rhys, he may be found tomorrow'.

And outside it was blacker than pitch.

Goronwy saw Mrs Vaughan and came her doddering way.

'Nos da, Mrs Vaughan.'

'If you want to know more about that Meirion out of Llewynhuan, then take the green bus to the Saturday town, Mr Jones.'

And he said yes he would, and they parted on the corner, for her way was due West and his North.

He took a green bus to a Saturday town.

And he found that everything was cut and dried, and fine, and lively in this town. Even the air skipped. He thought if this town had an eye it should be of darkest grey, and look one way only, where things were green. And Goronwy was stood on a hard pavement only three minutes before he realised that half a mile below, and more than that, men were moving about like moles in the dead forests. And by the time they got to the light and a decent level of air he realised that this place was entitled to all the pubs it had, and that was forty eight, and even where the green bus had stopped he found himself hard up against one called The Jockey's Whip. And inside he could hear talking, and sometimes a sigh, and he knew that many a secret ache flowed as the ale flowed. And then he went in. He took a drink with him to a far corner and sat him down. The first thought in his head was, 'what a queer old place the world is.'

And there by him, and much closer than he had reckoned on, a woman that affrighted him. No hat to her head and three straight lines of hair, and three glimpses of a yellowing skull. And Goronwy looked twice. Three tiger stripes he saw.

'There's a tale' he thought, and looked at her again, but

only out of the extreme corner of one 'eye, and he saw he glass was empty, and he knew she didn't like it, and then he knew he would speak to her. Many women there. And many men. He saw them draped and folded and knotted in their seats, and one man standing hard to the counter, and looking like the bottom end of a corkscrew and it made Goronwy wonder at the kind of work he did. And looking around this place, lit up, and rows of flashing bottles and the brass shining, and the glasses tinkling, and a great fire blazing in one corner, he thought of the inside of a ship on fire, and an orchestra playing too loudly.

This woman leaned.

Goronwy stiffened, but only a bit.

'Fill her up, missus?'

'As you wish, man, just as you wish.'

And said it as though she didn't care a damn whether it was filled or not, and huddled there as though she'd been pushed down by a strong man. And he saw her again, and her glass, but little beyond it. Thick with smoke the air was, and any amount of ruinous shag being puffed from pipes.

She spoke.

'Are you in for the Benefit night?'

'Whose benefit?'

'Brass Knocker Jones.'

'Whose he?'

'Who *was* he? Smothered by some gas on the third road last week, Tuesday I think.'

Goronwy stared at shining bottles on a shelf.

Smothered. Gas. Third road. What guide book was that?

'Ah! Miner' Goronwy said.

'Well he wouldn't be a bloody greengrocer, this is a miner's town.'

This one could offer Goronwy nothing except her tiger-striped head. He got up and went through a hard press of men and brought back what she wanted, what she liked, what she waited for, every evening of a week.

'Thank-you, mister.'

'Damned if I can stop looking at her hatless dome' thought Goronwy.

And looked again.

And she saw him do it, and was as bold as brass.

'Swung by my hair seven and a half seconds on Moreby's conveyor belt, and my toes knockin' on a worse horror. Drunk all the compo money just to forget it. Your health, mister.'

'She has a real sharp eye' thought Goronwy, as he sat watching her.

'Where's your nice blue suit?' she said, 'where's your shiny cap?'

And Goronwy stared at her.

'Knew by your build, and any time by your feet, no offence, mister, in these parts we speak what we mean. You're of the Welsh lot?'

Goronwy said he was.

'Well I'm as English as Victoria's petticoats. And who're you after?'

'My time's my own.'

'We get the Welsh here a lot, from the Cynant parts, they're the best men for the dark country under us.'

'How far from here is Cynant?'

'Twelve and a half miles using your own feet, six by the bus, mister.'

Goronwy suddenly wanted to get up and go, yet he didn't, something holding him back.

'If you see a man here in the evening time,' the woman said, 'you know he's the right to it, having broken a hard day. In this place men sweat for their money, and the brewers know it, mister.'

Goronwy's mood changed; he didn't like her manner or her speech.

'Are you instructing me?'

'Take it or leave it, mister, a man can sweeten his throat here if he's the mind, it's a free country.'

'Wasn't there a man by the name of Benbow Evans that used to keep this place?' asked Goronwy.

She knew everybody and everything, even Benbow Evans.

'Called Slit-Eye by some who had the measure of the place' Goronwy said.

'Oh him! He's down at the Blue Boar now, and not looking a day older.'

'And didn't there used to come to this place now and again a hewer of stones, by the name of Meirion out of Llewynhuan, some years back, I forget the number?'

'Him! Has he risen from the grave then?'

Goronwy thought she had the sharpest tongue of any woman he had ever met.

'Well no. For only by a miracle could he rise from under the great weight of stone that took down his drunken bone that night. He had a son, Rhys.'

'And is he dead, too, then?'

'Well no - not exactly' said Goronwy, 'but he's lost. Gone off, vanished and after being at that Cilgyn any number of years, and crowned king by the children there, so says Huw Ellis of The Mill and The Goat.'

And for the first time he saw her laugh.

'In the end the devil will cut his hair for him' this woman said.

'You've seen the cloud?'

'Have in my day.'

'When last?'

'Ah! – a long time ago, and a wind so striving under him I thought he'd go up and sail along in the upper airs, like a boat, mister.'

'I've a friend' Goronwy said, 'who knew him inside out, but the father only slightly. The tale of the cloud is a locked door, missus.'

And again she was laughing at Goronwy.

'You're as Welsh as a leek, but you have a kind face, mister, and that's only because you never blew in on an East wind. Now if you filled up that glass for me, each glass lightens the mauled feeling on top, why I'd take you down to a place called The Top Boot, and I'd show you a fine old scholar of a man, sat in a dark corner he always is, and show you how thirty years of teaching the young of the land has turned him into a fish flesh sort of man, and two dead eyes to him. And around that place he's known as Sir Flook, and he's the one they say taught that drunken prophet way back in Cynant, that is long before he went crazy with his hair. Sir Flook lives in a shiny little villa some gents built for him just back of that place, off a high road, and it has a brass bell on the door.'

'Who then?'

'That Johnny Humphrey and call him Sir Flook count of his delicate ways and his little airs, and sometimes he looks steady at what's too late for him now, and staring away at what he'll never get this side of the world, 'cept in violent dreams in any dark corner that waits on him. Sad, really,

mister, and funny, too. They'd laugh from here to Bagillt and back and all the way to that Cilgyn if they ever heard he got caught tight by a counter in between two trollops.'

'Then let's go there then,' Goronwy said, 'and thank you kindly, missus.'

And they got up and went out, and there was something so loud and brazen about that one, that Goronwy was ashamed all the way to The Top Boot, and after getting out of the bus he was glad to see the back of her and her miserable stripes. 'Night, mister' she shouted, then went off in a high fit of laughing, and cried again, 'see you again, I hope,' and in the wink of an eye she was caught up in a flood of young miners with bright scrubbed faces, who had just jumped off a green bus, and throwing themselves into the Regal only just in time for an hour and a half of that Russell midriff.

'Ugh!' exclaimed Goronwy. 'Thank heaven for that,' and stepped into The Top Boot, and it was a long time before he got the memory of the mauled head clear of his mind. Snug was what he called the place the minute he sat down. Licencee name of Tommy Hughes and as Welsh as anybody out of Cilgyn. And this time he took only a shandy and preferred his own company for some minutes, but his eye moved to every point of the compass. And there he was. Sir Flook himself at a little table, hunched up there. Goronwy thought it was the widest open, the hungriest look he had ever seen on the face of a man.

Slate-coloured eyes, and Goronwy knew they were, even under the bad light. And a mouth to him like a shut purse that has two sixpences in it and clutched by uncertain fingers. And a chin aching to slip down inside his collar, and brewer's medals on a vest too bright for The Top Boot.

Little girl's knees drawn up tight to him, tight and cosy inside wide grey trousers, and snug up almost to his chin.

'Just like little girl's knees' Goronwy said to himself.

The moment he moved an inch nearer he had his eye.

'Evening sir' Goronwy said.

'Evening.'

'I've seen you some place before' said Goronwy, knowing every word had rust on it.

'Not me' replied Sir Flook, 'nobody sees me now, though I see everybody.'

'You're living Cynant way?'

'I am. And what of that?'

'Heard of you. Famous for your knowledge of the Hafod: Am I right? Am I wrong?'

'Right' the old man said.

And Goronwy noted a sudden flush of pride to the old scholar's face.

'You knew a man named Meirion out of Llewynhuan, a while back.

Taught his son, Rhys the Cloud?'

'I can recall the name.'

'But you remember the child Rhys?'

And Sir Flook looked very hard at Goronwy, and then he knew it was coming. And it was the first page open of the book of Rhys the Cloud.

'You're good at the maps, too. Heard about that' Goronwy said.

'My map is a child's face' Sir Flook replied. 'What do you want?'

'Was he – young Rhys I mean, was he what you would call a light-headed child?'

'I hope *all* children are light-headed' said Sir Flook, and Goronwy was very struck by the seriousness in his voice.

'When that child was six, sir, I spoke to him one morning in the class. I asked him what he wished to be when he grew up. He said a Bank Director. Note that, sir. Not a bank clerk, not even a bank manager. But a director. The poor child. There was such bravery in it that I patted his head and I took a silver sixpence out of my pocket and I gave it to him. But he was only one of many maps.'

'And what of Cynant itself?'

'Well, What of it?' enquired Sir Flook, and Goronwy had an idea that very soon this man would be on his dignity, and that having an edge to it.

'Well,' snapped Sir Flook, 'what of it?'

And to tell you the truth that Goronwy didn't know, at least not for a minute or two. Then a thought struck him and his tongue was moving but Sir Flook had suddenly turned his back on him.

'Ah! Well now! How are you indeed, why it's a long time since I saw you here, Mrs. Parry, well well —'

And that Goronwy staring, but he couldn't see her, and he aimed she was even smaller than Sir Flook, and then he heard her speaking, and every word with a squeak in its tail, and the thin, tremulant notes of a flute to the voice.

'Well indeed' she said, and even now Goronwy couldn't find her.

'You'll have a little aniseed in it' Sir Flook said, and Goronwy wondered "in what". Then Sir Flook gave a little cough and Goronwy's door was wide open and there she was, Goronwy opened his mouth, but only air came out.

A ball of string with a hat on, and a feather to that and bright as a warning light.

'A tiny little ball of life' thought Goronwy, 'and a feather like an ultimatum.'

'This is —' Sir Flook was saying, and there was the ball of string moving towards a seat, and Sir Flook's hard dry palm exposed Goronwy's way and as the old man moved he noticed the first little air of the great number he had, and the woman from The Jockey's Whip was right.

'Mrs Parry' Sir Flook said. 'This is a gentleman from — where, sir?'

'Cilgyn.'

'And the name?'

'Goronwy Jones.'

And Goronwy only had the tips of her fingers, in his own for the split part of a second before the whole hand fell from him like a cold stone.

'Sit there, Mrs Parry.'

'Thank you, John Humphrey. When I come in through that side door just now, trust that Tommy to say I was meetin' my friend in here, and he said "it's devil a bit and no more that two people like you can see of each other", the great hulk he is, and I blasted him under my breath and here I am.'

'And glad I am to see you. Now there's some say I've a feverish eye for what's younger, Mrs Parry, but it's a cruel libel, and one day I'll have writs served on four thousand two hundred and thirty five people in this Sodom and I mean every word of it.'

The ball of string sat close to the childless man, for all his children had scattered years ago. And Goronwy looked at his fast emptying glass, and over its top to the pair beside him. This town was all fire, and smoke, and belch, and grind, and even the hours clanged. And Goronwy knew

that he must raise no eyebrow at what was sometimes belched out of the din at the day's end. And in a corner there, three miners, and in another two navvies, and in another, three old women, and their shining sons in blue suits. And anything that was jagged, or hunched, or craven, or clutched tight, or knotted, or powerfully twisted, and showed a face and two heels would not surprise the man from Cilgyn. And he thought of Sir Flook thrown clear of his cloister and tossed in as violent a sea as ever he had crossed.

'You will have a drink on me, sir, and you, too, Mrs Parry. Isn't your's something with aniseed in it?'

'*Anything* with aniseed in it' the old woman said, and Goronwy thought, 'how desperate,' and asked Sir Flook what was his.

'I like gin, sir, with really scalding water, and much sugar. Thank you.'

And Goronwy walked up to Tommy Hughes behind the counter.

'Who's he?' the ball of string said.

'I'll tell you. He's a fell person, an agent, smelt of the law, stank of it, I should have thought *you* with your long experience would have noticed that?'

'They always want something What's he want?'

'Information about an old pupil of mine. You knew his father.'

Wait. He's coming back. Remember not *too* much, and not *too* little. He will pay for each word we let loose.'

'Who will?'

'That man from Cilgyn. Didn't you know that Rhy the Cloud had vanished—'

'The mad man with the hair?'

'The same, and even the hills know it now.'

'I've seen him stood in this place more than once —'

'Sssh!'

'Your drink, Mrs Parry. Your gin, sir.'

'Thank-you, sir.'

And even before Goronwy sat down Sir Flook's gin was gone.

'Now sir, what are you after?' he said, for the gin emboldened him.

'I move about in my own time,' Goronwy said, 'and my feet follow my curiosity.'

'Here is one who very nearly married that Llewynhuan creature.'

'No!'

'Yes indeed. She saw him live and dead, didn't you, Mrs Parry?'

'I did indeed.'

The feather bobbed.

'You bin talkin' to Sir Flook about Meirion of Cynant?'

'I have.'

'I heard about that Rhys yesterday just as I was making my tea. In Africa they do it with drums, here we can do it better, the hills are wise. Now I was sorry when I heard he'd gone away. And if my feet didn't always betray me on a long walk, why I would have gone up to that Cilgyn to see Iolo's grandmother there, for he was the great friend she had, and sang her many a noble song out of the book on a lonely night, when you were better off back of the wind there. You know that Huw Ellis, a splendid man that is—I haven't your name, sir —'

'Goronwy Jones, Mrs Parry' piped Sir Flook. 'New policeman. Mother used to live Bagillt way, had a tidy little

house there, Cartref. Not much I don't hear, little I don't want to, that's what age does for you.'

'Seen both of them in here and in that Blue Boar, and The Jockey's Whip and The Blue Moon, mister. That Meirion and his mad son.'

'Mad.'

'And happy with it' Mrs Parry said, 'that's all that counts. Seen that Huw Ellis here, too. Used to come here often, mister, that was before a fall of roof had my man at Llay and murdered the life out of him. And in them days you daren't call the place Welsh, so full it was of the English and the Lancashire lot. And many a whore from Chester town too. What's earned hard is earned well, and it shines like light at the entrance to any of these places, and the women like moths. This is no fancy town. And no Chapel door locked spite of that, even that Meirion went Sundays, though God Almighty he had no more love or mercy for his own than the length of this hard aim

Now I was once having a drink with my man in this very place you sit in, mister, it was one of those bold nights you get after the middle of November's gone. And I even remember the scattering crowd that Tommy Hughes had that time, and even the time it was, and that was around nine of the clock, And I remember that night well by reason of something that I saw with two clean eyes. And that was by a great somersault in the nature of the hardest man that ever walked the roads. And that man was him out of Llewynhuan, and Cynant after that. Stood in the middle of the bright bar he was, the giant of a towering man that looked down on everybody. And one of those women there, you know the name, mister, even in the Book-well- There she was, and as close to that Meirion as wasn't safe

for anybody in the fires of drink. You could see by the very look of her that she might have him *her* road home, and yet she didn't, for he drew away as though she were some-thin' that might soil him, and she didn't like that. No, sir. What woman of her name would? I ask you? And then I suppose she hated him —'

'Drink up, dear' Sir Flook said.

'Yes, dear, I am,' and her eyes like beads fastened on Goronwy.

'I remember lookin' at him, and thunkin' of her back home, and that Rhys there, the child then, and the candle lit, and shadows on a wall and on a stone floor. Now he saw this one turn round and cry out her loudest for what she saw having, and they gave it to her, and she drank it. Then she turned her round and laughed right in the face of him out of Llewynhuan. He stood there, mountain man that he was and he said nothing, and she came a step nearer and he went a step backward, and everybody watching'. Then she turned to a woman that was with her, and her man beside her, and as she turned she gave that Meirion the weight of her shawl, and she cried out for another drink, and they gave it to her, and she drank that, too. Then she said something in a low voice to this woman with her, and they both laughed, and then the man, and she whispered to the man, and he said in a loud voice how Llewynhuan's wife was one of three bitches blown in on an ill wind out of a place called Pig-y-Bont, and it was cruel, mister, and a sacrilege to hear him say 't against a creature like her. Not a sound then, and it was sudden, and even that clock might be stopped, and the air still, like nobody was breathin' at all. Then one after another they was slippin' away quietly 'out of it, like you hurry home before the thunder is down

on you. But I sat tight, and my man with me, and I was glad of him that night.'

'How well you remember things, Mrs Parry' Sir Flook said.

'Now the man what sometimes didn't know that his own wife lived, and wouldn't much care if she was found dead, so hard he was, well that man almost turned himself upside down and then he *leaped* – and he had this man with the bad tongue high in the air, and then he let him drop, and he cried out that it wasn't finished, and it wasn't, mister, by far. He cleaved a passage that Meirion did, and taking the name of God in his mouth he caught that man by one finger and a thumb around the back of his neck, and he held there, and he was quite still and not a word spoken out of him, and none by us, so it was silence wrapped round you. And I, and my man looked at this one, and the others the same, and you knew there was squeezin' goin' on, for his face was turnin' colour, and before long he might be turned into a Welsh nigger. Then Llewynhuan cried out. "Eat it back into you, man, eat it back I say", and he squeezed the harder.

The light shone hard on them.

Than it came, quick, and you saw what it was. Shame in that man coming up, right from his toes, leapin' up his body to his face, and there was the face as sick as sick, and darkened by the flush of his own words flooded there, and shone like sweat.'

'And that's true enough' Sir Flook said, and just then Mrs Parry got up, and Goronwy was curious to see how she walked, thinking she might just roll out to that secret place she had to get to. And then she was gone.

'Duw!' exclaimed Goronwy.

'Know who she is?'

'No, I don't' Goronwy said, 'then who?'

'Mother of sailor Parry. Ever heard of him?'

'Know ten Parrys but not that one.'

'Her son ran off with Rhys's woman, heard of that?'

'Oh yes indeed, I have heard of that' said Goronwy.

'And of the ship that grew in his brain, and masted there, and in Swansea Bay, too?'

'No, sir, I never heard of that.'

Sir Flook leaned forward.

'Give her a glass of what she likes and she'll talk her boots off, sir.'

Goronwy saw the hint, and that Sir Flook's dry mouth, and he went off, and got what they liked, and came back with it.

'Here she is. Ssh!'

Goronwy was still hoping he'd see that woman roll back to her seat, but almost without his realising it, she was already there, and sat tight, and the bright feather stood out and it irritated him, and he hated it.

'You're not drinking' the scholar said.

'Na ddigon! Na ddigon!'

'What'll come now?' Goronwy asked himself.

But nothing came, and nothing would this side of the clock. This was end and he knew it. The mouth was locked and bolted, and only once did he glimpse the green teeth that had parted to swallow what he had paid for.

'I wonder if they'll ever find that Rhys The Wound now?' asked Sir Flook, and at once that Mrs Parry was erect, and stiff as a guardee.

'Find him in a rabbit hole, I expect' she said, and that feather was bobbing again, just like a sail on a boy's boat.

'I don't know' replied Goronwy, 'but we must hope, that's all'.

'It wouldn't surprise me, sir' announced Sir Flook, 'if I heard this very minute that he had been drawn up to high heaven, by the tresses of his cloud. He knew every angel in kingdom Come.'

'I was telling Mr Jones here about Olfyr and the Hughes girl, *and* poor old Huw' said Sir Flook, and he leaned towards the ball of life and smiled confidence at her, and trust, and watching closely, Goronwy thought, even a faint hope for the future, so well did they appear to know each other.

'Duw! Often I used to sit to a window and think of my man down in that dark country, and when his bone thinned I'd dream him safely out of it, and clear of the black walls, and hell's floor, and the smell of the deepest part of the world. And I dreamed him out of it a year hence and was too late, and a lovely part of the year it was, that September time, and three days off from the last day of that month saw the fall of roof that took the living breath out of him, and I buried him with the seven pounds ten I got and that was the end of that. And around that time, too, the lad I had dreams up a ship. Three years he had down in the same country with his dad, and that was enough, and ever after the first month the sea was heaven, and any old ship the door to it—'

'Every child I ever taught, Mr Jones' said Sir Flook, 'every child, save that Rhys, had a father down in that country. And I remember that Olfyr very well and the sea could be seen in his eye at a *very* early age,' he paused to look at his friend. 'You *never* heard of him again, Mrs Parry?'

'Drown-ded' she said. 'In some Indian ocean they said.'

'I'm sorry' Goronwy said, and got a jerk of the shoulder from the little woman, and no more than that.

She was staring hard at the clock, and so was that Sir Flook. 'I'm off' she said suddenly, and seemed to bounce to her feet.

'Wait' said Sir Flook, 'I'm coming now.'

'No. I won't do that. The dark night's down on us and a wind coming' up, and I've three roads to go, and four fields to cross. Listen the wind?'

And beyond the frosted window they heard it.

Goronwy too, got up.

'I've my bus to catch to Swch y Rhiw, and then the long walk to Cilgyn. God! I hope that Rhys has turned up, for Cilgyn will never seem the same without him. They tell me he loved the same girl as your son, Olfyr, Mrs. Parry.'

'He loved Christ better, but that's a tale of the summer-time' she said, gave one more glance at the clock, and half turned. 'John Humphrey, I'm going', and she did.

Goronwy got up to let her pass, watching greedily for the shape of her feet, and then he saw her shuffling her crowded way, and another quick turn of the head, and a loud 'Nos da,' and Sir Flook's back to her, and then the door closed.

Sir Flook sat down.

'I must go' Goronwy said.

'Wait,' the scholar said.

'I once asked that Rhys child to write me down the seven wonders of the world, and he seemed a little more hesitant than the other boys, as though he wasn't sure, but eventually he found them for me, and wrote them down. Eight he found, not seven, and all of them in Cynant.'

In Goronwy's mind the bus for Swch y Rhiw was revving up and he leaned over Sir Flook and took his hand.

'A pleasure to have met you, sir' he said, 'now I must go.'

'Wait.'

And Goronwy felt the light, child-size hand upon his arm, The hand carried a message for him, and it said, 'wait! Don't go', and then he felt the child leap out, and it said. 'don't leave me'. Goronwy looked right over Sir Flook's head, and it met the watching eye of that Tommy Hughes. 'Is it the blue bus that travels to Swch y Rhiw?' asked Goronwy.

'It is indeed', and the child-like hand was still clutching. Goronwy still held that Hughes's eye. Round as a barrel Hughes, and his face lost in its fat. And then he saw a finger rise up from a fatter hand.

'Excuse me, sir, one moment' Goronwy said, and he pressed Sir Flook hard against the green shining wall, and he walked straight up to that barrelled Hughes.

'You go with him?'

Hughes had leaned his bull neck far over that counter, and the whisper came clear to Goronwy.

'I go his way. I'm for Cilgyn.'

'Listen!'

And he listened.

'That man's years are like walls, sir, and how they rise up before and behind him, confronting and damning him for a waste of life. A perilous life that must come to a pub to live. He *clutches* at people.'

'He has a home. I heard about it. A shiny villa back of a high road and six good miles from here.'

'Never in it.'

'But he sleeps there.'

'That's all. Look! He's beckoning you.'

Sir Flook was stood away from the wall, dead centred in this bright room, and his eye never left that of the man from Cilgyn.

'I shall walk his way' Goronwy said.

Hughes leaned closer still.

'That tit-bit of a woman name of Parry that just went out, she went his way one night, count of his loneliness, and never once since then. And once I asked her why.'

'And why then?'

'His house is the darkness chained to the ground'.

'*She* said that?'

'She said it'.

'Nos da' cried Goronwy.

'Nos da' cried Hughes, and at that moment he caught side of a man coming in, and only three desperate minutes left on the clock, and he was one from Pant-ar-fynach, oldest mister in this reeking town, and Hughes cried, 'Hello there, Dynwyn, better hurry, man.' And rushed to serve him, for the clock's hand crawled near to the closing time. And Goronwy walked away and he took Sir Flook's hand, and he led the old man out.

And they moved for the darkness chained to the ground.
 Out into the burling and bloody Saturday airs.
 The closing time shouts shot out from many a doorway and
 split the air about them, and they walked quickly, and the
 wind behind them.

They talked.

'Is there no bus *your* way home, sir?'

'No bus.'

Their voices rose on two quite different levels of the air.
 And speaking, Sir Flook would look right up to Goronwy,
 Goronwy look far down. And only the goblin-clutch
 upon his arm signalled the man beside him.

'You come to The Top Boot every evening?'

'Every evening, if I can. I like to see people' said Sir
 Flook.

A girl's giggle leaped out at them from a doorway, and
 Goronwy saw only a miner's shadow and heard the heavy
 breathing there.

'The darkness is moving,' exclaimed Goronwy, 'the night
 itself is quite drunk.'

'What do you want?'

The question came so suddenly that Goronwy stopped dead
 in his tracks.

'Me? Nothing.'

'But you said you were here for information about Rhys The Cloud?'

'And so I am. It's why I came. His life roused my curiosity. No more than that.'

'Curiosity is sometimes rather cheap.'

'If you had got the measure of the Cilgyn effort for a lost man, sir, you wouldn't say that.'

The goblin hand caught Goronwy's.

'I've offended you. I'm sorry, I'm half a man, and crabbed at birth'.

Goronwy, stumbling through the darkness, suddenly turned left, but the scholar pulled him sharp right.

'This way.'

'Wind seems to be from the West' remarked Goronwy.

'North-West, sir.'

'No! I think due West —'

'Damn you, sir, I said North-West, I know my geography.' And that man from Cilgyn was suddenly ten years old and seated at his desk at school at Macsaleg, and he said very obediently, 'yes sir.'

But Sir Flook did not reply, and they went their way, and Goronwy, too, was silent. Far ahead they could see giant moving shadows.

'How the wind lashes at them' cried Sir Flook. 'Look! The trees reel like men.'

'It sounds like the sea.'

'Beyond the bricks and mortar it will be wholly free and it will *rage*. I once thought of a lost sea, suddenly caught between great walls and turned to dead water.'

Goronwy could not hear. His head was well down, and the wind mouthing at him.

'By eleven I should be back at Cilgyn. I wonder if Huw

Ellis has any news?’

‘How far now?’ he asked, ‘for I must catch that bus to Swch y Rhw.’

‘Not far now.’

And it was further than that.

And they walked on and were held fast, and well lost in the deepening darkness.

‘Wherever you walk today, the mortar devours the grass.’

‘How far now?’

‘Not very far now, Mr Jones’ Sir Flook said.

Yet it seemed further still.

‘What is the name of your villa, sir?’

‘Penybont-ar-Ogwr, though the devil’s gone.’

‘The bridge hard by your place then. Is it of stone?’

‘Cheap Ruabon brick, and a bloody red at that.’

And for the first time that evening old John Humphrey broke into a laugh. Dead centred in it Goronwy felt the ice, the tiny shiver in the too sudden laugh.

‘What time is it?’

‘Plenty of time, Mr Jones.’

Wind coiled about them like many ropes. Goronwy felt the child-like grip grow firmer still. And then Sir Flook stopped dead.

‘Marw! Yn oes oesoedd’ he shouted into the wind.

‘Who?’

‘The man with the cloud upon his head.’

‘I don’t believe it.’

‘Don’t. But I feel that he is. You say you heard a winter’s tale at The Mill and the Goat?’

‘I did indeed.’

‘I could tell you a summer’s tale’ said the scholar, ‘and of a man-child with his hands cupped in the early morning to

catch the sunlight. That tale should be close to a fire and the wind howling.'

'He'll come back, sir. I once heard he was away for a whole three months.'

'Truly dead, I'm afraid' said Sir Flook. 'Maybe cut his throat. The violence in him would flow from his father's veins.'

And now it was Goronwy Jones gripping hard upon that dry stick of an arm.

'Cilgyn's hope is two claws ready to spring on any sight or sound of Rhys The Wound and the Cloud.'

'A longish name for one, who, after all, was nothing more than an old tramp.'

Goronwy broke the mood.

'How far now?'

'No further. Here is Penybont-ar-Ogwr.'

'Why do you call it that?'

'I like the sound of it.'

Even in the darkness Goronwy could pick out that shiny villa, and it was sat tight and hugged by others, and all in a dead straight line, so they looked like tailored houses. At the fifth the old man took Goronwy's hand.

'An old man's castle' said Sir Flook.

Goronwy stood on the clean white step, whilst the scholar fished about for the key.

'Do you have many visitors?'

'No. Not many. Most times I prefer my own company, that's when I'm not hard fast in The Top Boot. Any time I can sit back in my leather chair and summon up my company. Careful there, Mr Jones, careful, the linoleum is new. Note how it shines, that Lewis the Stores only brought it yesterday. Careful now,' and Goronwy stepped gingerly

after him. They were in the hall, and it was darker still.

'Strike a match.'

'There!'

Goronwy was hard by a black door and he turned the handle.

'Locked' Sir Flook said.

'Leave it' he cried.

Opposite was another door and Goronwy caught its handle.

'Locked.'

'This way' the scholar said. 'I will make you a cup of tea, you'll just have time for it before the bus comes along, Mr Jones.'

'I'm sorry' Goronwy began, and Sir Flook said, 'you want to get back to wind-blown Cilgyn, that's it, isn't it?'

'Shall I draw the curtains, sir?'

'Leave them.'

'This blind?'

'Leave it.'

'Very well.'

'I live *here*. Strike another match,' and it was struck.

A kitchen with a stone floor, and a high black grate and no fender. A clock ticking, high up, unseen. A great leather-backed chair. Goronwy stared. He walked up to the great chair, and John Humphrey was behind him. He touched the chair.

'I live *there*' he said.

Goronwy turned away. Nothing he could see save that high grate, the stone floor, and a leather chair. Swinging down on him the hammer tick, and the clock as yet unseen. And then he saw the table. Books and bread-crumbs. 'Y Llan' spread out flat upon the table, and tea-stained and worn. He picked up a heavy book, leather bound. And in a moment Sir Flook was behind him.

'My bedmate,' he whispered in Goronwy's ear.

'Lovely' said the man from Cilgyn, 'lovely.'

'Sit down in my chair, Mr Jones.'

And he sat.

He saw the curtainless window, and against the glass a scrawny old bush. It rocked madly there, and watching it, Goronwy saw green fingers, and hungry and pawing at the panes.

Not a sound, yet in a moment that Sir Flook was gone. Goronwy looked about him. The scholar had lit a candle and now it spluttered on the high mantleshef.

'The queer place' he thought.

Then by the lift of a cloud was that room drowned in light, and the Cilgyn man looked out, and there was the cold yard, and the moon down, and Sir Flook's shadow across the paved place. The scholar bent to a tap that gave the water, for none other than this would that John Humphrey drink. Goronwy watched him fill the kettle. The wind played with his hair as he bent to the tank.

'Now there's a sad man' he thought, and he stared about him, and here were books, and there were books, and more again, and every one to bolt his manhood's door.

'Poor Sir Flook, he looks like a broken dream.'

He turned and looked down the great length of chair, and even in that light he saw how the black leather shone from the long slow work of that scholar's back, and knew it bent eager to the book, and thrown back exhausted to the leather, and all in the long nights after that Top Boot had closed its great black doors.

'Here' said Goronwy to himself, 'here in this small room I will find the breath, and the shape, and the days of the man

I want to know,' and that man was Rhys The Wound with the cloud upon his head.

Then Sir Flook came in with the tea.

They drank, and were strangely silent. And only the clock's tick could say whether Goronwy would catch that blue bus or the ghost of it.

'That schoolroom now' said Sir Flook.

'Yes' Goronwy said.

'Mountains throw down their burdensome shadows on many a house, and in all seasons of a year that schoolroom seemed begrudged the light of day, and yet to me the best light that ever shone there, came from the faces in it, all young and as fresh as the day. Twelve boys I had, and that Rhys in the second bench from the window that looked out on a mass of rock that I called Cawres, for it had in some odd way the woman's shape. That very first look I had of Rhys, I saw him sad. And in a child, sir, it is like nothing you can ever imagine. The delicate bone and the soft flesh holding it, and the eye that mirrors it. Ah! How it strains at a child.

I knew his home, his hurling father, his holy mother. Some mornings that Rhys slyly wolfed the crust he brought, and I watched, and I said nothing. And sometimes he could carry in his person the shadow of a violence on some hard morning, and that would be a cold time after the pay night at the quarry, his father having shouldered his way to the fire that he wanted. The mother like a frail bird, and even her shadow crouched. For life *was* crouching then, every God's minute and every devil's hour of it, for she took many a blow. And I knew and I said nothing. Yet sometimes the longing in me cried out, rose up, and I wanted to stride out after that Meirion and strike and strike, and I would laugh when the blood came.'

John Humphrey paused.

Goronwy had thrown wide his arms, and they lay flat and still on the arms of the leather chair, and even whilst he watched, the man bent to him, he heard that bright blue bus go past for Swch y Rhiw.

They looked at each other in silence. Goronwy waited.

'I'd that Parry, too,' Sir Flook said, 'lean and short in the flanks, straw haired, full lipped, and even then the sea stood in his eye. He'd a father, too, yet kinder, but you know that already, sir. Now he walked many an iron mile, and towards something more fell than the highest eagle ledge that Prothero's place could boast, and he was a fine man. The ache came early to the boy and he soon turned his long back on the green places, but not before he planted the wound that on this old night lies heavy on a missing man.'

'Yes, yes' exclaimed Goronwy, and Sir Flook knew at once how excited that Cilgyn policeman had become. He lifted the shining pot.

'More tea, Mr Jones?'

'Llawer o ddiolch.'

And only then did Goronwy realise that Sir Flook had been down on his bended knees, and leaning hard to that leather chair, for now the scholar rose with creaking bone, and poured more tea into the bright cup.

'Sometimes I would sit at my desk and just stare at the faces. I dreamed often through their eyes. In that Parry's eyes I even saw the colours of an Ionian sea Yet from child to man the colour of Rhys's eyes never changed; held fast to grey that was soft and as clean as a mountain stream.'

And Cilgyn's retired bard leaned further still.

'The pattern comes clear, like the veins to my hand. I know the tale of the house of stone, as I know many another.'

I have the bend and turn and effort of those days right before me, as clear as the black print on any white pages —' 'The gun in the black hole then? And what of that?' asked Goronwy.

'That came later, and it can wait now. There were other pains and they were not growing pains. I see the child this very moment. I see him run to the bell's sound. Running towards me. How often he had already been the mountain round, for the black thing they succoured in the high places was a mean bitch and that's the best they could ever have said of it.'

'The black cow called Jane?'

'The same.'

Goronwy watched the old man spill tea as he clumsily drank.

'Rhys was his father, sir, in his boy's pants. A man forced in before his time. He stood by his gentle mother, and ran after the ever calling father. Each day I watched Rhys sit quiet to his desk, Quietest one I had, as though something in the room closed down on him the moment he entered it, for without he was very different. And once he came up to stare at the globe of the world, and slowly turned it round, was silent, then walked away. He cried some days, but so far down into his blouse that no boy knew. And in just seven days of the first week he came to me, I had the measure of his home.

Monday he wore his father's boots.

Tuesday his cut down pants.

Wednesday the lump on his head as big as a billiard ball.

Thursday found two crusts of dry bread in one pocket, that was his breakfast, and in another the handful of corn for any bird that would come to his beckoning finger, for he loved the things that flew.

And the things that burrowed, and the things that crawled, and the dog that died on him.

Friday came red-eyed to his desk and would not speak, and I let him be.

That night he would walk far and Cynant knew it.'

'I got its measure from Huw Ellis a night ago' Goronwy said. 'I watched him in the yard. He was never where the shouts rose, and never where the ball rolled, but fast to a corner, or sat under an old hedge and quiet there. Only in the years to come did that child learn to play —'

'I know that by the sight of my own eyes' Goronwy said.

'Liked being alone, being *left* alone. Not healthy in a child, sir. In those times a woman was sat upon a mighty throne, but the light from it never fell on these parts, and hunger then was as clamorous as the wolf's tongue. And yet that Rhys was lucky. Take Parry now! And as I told the child myself, Parry, and others like him crawled flat on their bellies beside their fathers in places darker than that stone house, and darker than Cynant.'

'And that was true enough' Goronwy said.

'Played with the world about him. Nose in a rabbit hole, many a tree climbed, swimming in a stream, and any time bits of fern or broken flower hanging about him, a mole on a string, mice in a cage, a raven named Lucifer that he guarded most carefully. A sweet voice and sang well in the choir Sundays, and linked his mother home and was happy in all those ways. And strange, too, came early to love the Book and the Word in it. Read well and with some feeling, yet in my class-room, what I put into him tumbled out at the day's end, and I knew the head could not take it and would never have it. And I knew, too, that the tramp was born. And soon to come. Down went that Meirion Mawr,

and then one Spring afternoon the mother stiff and silent, yet peaceful, and I am sure she was happy, too. The stone house threw clear two shadows inside of thirty days and Rhys was as free as the air that he breathed.'

'And the gun in the black hole, sir?' asked Goronwy, pressing still.

'You heard it from Huw Ellis' cried Sir Flook, and Goronwy saw how quickly he could change.

'His tone's quite sharp of a sudden,' he thought.

'I did' Goronwy said.

'My tale is shorter than that, and you can have it' the scholar said.

'Yes?' said Goronwy.

'I was on my kness when I heard it. Alone in the chapel I was. The word came. A child has tried to blow out its brains. I knew. At once. "He hasn't any" I cried, and I turned round quickly like I was on a swivel and there was Aled, a true friend in those Cynant parts.

He flung words hot in my ear, and I jumped to my feet then.

"God Almighty! man, you're not in school *now*" that Aled said. I could not move. Yet I knew I would go to the woman and not the man. He would be out, snoring in some hole or other perhaps, for Sunday shut doors on the fire he loved to toss into him. Yet I stood there, held, and I could not move. I *knew*. Saw the black cellar and the child there, and the shining damp on a wall and rat droppings anywhere. Felt sweat on a child's forehead, the soft knee that cushioned the cold metal, and the finger limp to the barrel. Saw the day before, and the day before that, and many a night, and remembered, too, the depth of snow in that time, the winter burden as he climbed, and the belt that sometimes fell too

hastily from the hand that held it. That hole would be full of his violent father, yet in some tiny corner of the same, the child's sudden dream, and the way out.'

The blue cup fell from Goronwy's hand, and smashed to pieces at the scholar's feet.

'I'm terribly sorry, sir, terribly sorry, and your best cup, too.'

Sir Flook waved a hand, 'what's an old cup anyhow', he said. And for three whole minutes of a clock, neither spoke, nor looked towards the other, and each in his own way, saw the bloody moment, and the child.

The wind was down, the moon's light driving deeper, the scrawny bush still, and now dead weight against the naked glass.

Not a sound save the clock's tick, and four hands motionless where they lay.

'You may go when you wish, Mr Jones,' Sir Flook said, and the words seemed dragged from the tongue.

'What is the time, sir?' asked Goronwy.

'It is late,' said the old man.

'I hear the tick, yet cannot see the clock.'

'It's high in the cupboard there, and I only open the door to see the hour of day, and shut it from sight again, for I never liked a clock so naked that wherever I should turn I saw its face. Are you comfortable?'

The Cilgyn man did not answer. He got up and went to the cupboard, and looked in, and there on the highest shelf was the clock. He struck a match in the dark recess to see the time. Then he closed the chocolate-covered door, and returned to his place.

'It's twelve o'clock, sir' said Goronwy.

'And a lovely night for a long walk to Cilgyn, sir. Were I

your age, why I should love it, too. You've great feet, all policemen have, and I daresay they've broken many a distance down.'

Goronwy laughed, and as though he were suddenly pleased, the scholar clapped his hands.

'I shall go soon, sir' said Goronwy, and wondered if he would.

'If you come to that Top Boot place another night' said Sir Flook, 'why I'll show you somebody you would much like to see —'

'Who then?'

'It may wait', the scholar said 'Bring a cushion, you'll find what you want in the bottom shelf of that cupboard there, bring *two*, Mr Jones,' and Goronwy brought them

'Now we may huddle to the blaze,' the scholar said, and he placed his cushion down on the black hearth, and Goronwy likewise

'A little present for you, sir' said Goronwy, and there it was out of his pocket, and in the scholar's hand

'Now that was kind of you, Mr Jones Very kind indeed,' and he gave the man a smile

Goronwy watched as he turned to glance into the fire, and he saw the trembling hand that held the flask And shadow where the jaw hung The lines upon the face moved under the dancing flame

'The first time I ever looked in a mirror, sir, I knew I had come from a line of dwarfs —'

Goronwy sat up at once

'I have been a watcher, Mr Jones A watcher and never a sharer,' said Sir Flook

'The riddle is the bard's country' thought the man from Cilgyn, 'now has that old scholar ever been a bard?'

And he watched closely at Sir Flook, and he noted the change.

The head was far back and resting on one of the black pillars, and the eyes were closed. He heard the scholar breathe.

'I watched others in their glory' the scholar said.

'Others, sir?'

Goronwy leaned far across the fire. 'Others, sir?'

'That Parry now.'

'Parry? The little woman's son we met this night?'

'The same.'

Goronwy stretched out one hand into the warm air of the room. He might have been feeling for the answer, for this man's words seemed yet wrapped in a riddle.

'That Rhys one, too. The man with the cloud upon his head.'

'I do not understand, sir' said Goronwy.

'You will. And many another I watched, and they walked far from the town.'

'Who sir?'

'People, just people' said Sir Flook.

'I think you are tired, sir.'

'I am not tired. When you walked with me I told you I would tell you a summer's tale. And I will do so. You ask of Rhys, the man with the mane, and I will tell you, and he is bent to Parry, and they are bent to the girl named Olwen who came from a great distance. From the place that was Llanfair-ym-Muallt, and at this time of day may be called Builth.'

And he told the Cilgyn man the tale of the wound, and the cloud, and the ship, and the dream, and the fair girl from Llanfair-ym-Muallt.

* * *

Goronwy leaned heavily against the tall grate, his hands clasped loosely about his knees. And in the flame of the fire he saw Cilgyn sleeping and Cilgyn dead. He listened, and counted every stroke of a clock, and pondered much on that scholar's lively tongue. Once he fancied himself crossing the forked road where the white stone stood, and saw it say in big black lettering, 'CIL GYN 13½ MILES'. And again he saw himself turn the key of his door in the middle of that long silent street. He heard the measured breathing on the other side of the fire. And at no great distance a mongrel howled at the moon.

'I will tell you a tale of the man from the house of stone, and of Parry from the mine. Of two quickened by sight of the same girl, and her name was Olwen Hughes. Of a high hill and a great bare field. And of the small wooden place at its extreme end. It was an old hut, any man's hut, and any tramp's night lodging, and it had a wind-ravaged door, and all its timbers held the rot. And on its smelling fungoid floor, that Parry lay and had his dream. Of the other who walked far back to the house of stone, and in its ruins lay for three whole days, and in fright, fled. Of the ship that towered in that Swansea Bay, and of the man who leapt for it, and the girl from Llanfair-ym-Muallt beside him —'

'Already I know of the birth of the cloud that sat upon the tall man's head' said Goronwy, but Sir Flook seemed not to have heard, for he went on.

'One was sly and eager and calculating, for he was fired by his dream, and the other was shy and simple and as open as the child's hand.'

'Yes sir, I'm listening' said Goronwy quickly, and collected himself, for he had been thinking of his long walk to Cilgyn under the moon.

'The gun in the hole was an old tale when next I heard of Meirion's son. And I heard some say that he was happy from the very moment he left that house of stone, and went his free way, and the great book lashed to his back. He had walked far through the day, and all of the night, until he came to that place of which I spoke, that Llanfair-ym-Muallt. Said he worked on a farm there and was happy. Happy! Some people think them wise, and even have its measure. Perhaps he was happy, perhaps he wasn't. But it was there, in that lush place, that he first saw that Olwen Hughes —'

'She who went away with the Parry man?' asked Goronwy.

'That very one, Mr Jones' replied Sir Flook.

'And how was that?'

'Because she came from that Llanfair-ym-Muallt all the way along to a place that is called The Green Gate, there to work for some of the English lot. You work for them in England, too, but that is how it is. I think the name was Brown, yes indeed it was, for it is a silly name. And Meirion's son followed her, threw up his work to do so. Brainless he might be, but the man's fire in his blood had turned his feet her way.'

'She did come then?'

'And took a lodging for three days, whilst she prepared herself for that new life in the big house. Not three miles, sir, from where today that blue bus moves off for Swch y Rhiw.'

'Well indeed!'

'I will put more coal to the fire' said Sir Flook, and his shadow leapt from wall to wall.

'The clock ticks away, sir' said Goronwy.

'Then *let* it tick.'

'Cilgyn will think I'm lost, sir.'

'Then *let* it think.'

And Sir Flook threw coals to the fire.

'There! By this time on a clock I'm generally on my knees, but as I said to you this night, it's a rare thing with me, for I know everybody, yet few know me. That Parry woman came once, but never again.'

Sir Flook still had the tale, and he held the tale. The harsh clock struck one. Goronwy waited.

'And when it's come, why I'll tell myself again all the long road home,' thought Goronwy, and he wished the tale would come

* * *

'The first time he passed my window I knew who it was. His name was Parry. Years since I had seen him in that school-room. And his face was shining. Again another evening he passed my way, and still his face was shining. He had leapt up from the dark. His mother told me how. Of how often he walked out of the town, and far from the town. And I wondered why. One evening, and it was the summer time, I, too, walked far from the town, and far from the sight of that cheap Ruabon brick. I watched, sir, and all of me hid in a hedge. His mother's words were true, for he was watching for that Olwen Hughes —'

'Then how did he know, sir, and how did you?'

'In that Blue Boar I first heard it, for one night there came there a man from The Green Gate, a huge brute, and as

hairy as a bear. A gardener there, and that his free night out. So out of his drunken cup he said how lately those Browns had got them one who was even cheaper than the one they sacked, and her name was Olwen Hughes. A pretty girl will loosen any man's mouth, drunk or sober. But this one was drunk and said how one night he would get her measure. So one talked and another talked, and there were men who would carry it to any old place. One carried it to the very place that Parry shunned, and that man's butt being close to Parry, he had it, too. And Olwen was dirt on that brute's tongue, and gold on Parry's.

Now if you walk from there to a town you see the rock on one side, and on the other, woods. I hadn't walked far that evening before the rocks were green. I halted to look up at them, and then I thought it must be some very sudden change in the quality of the light. But when I looked to my right the great belt of trees were so tall and dense and overbearing, and so weighted by their own green flesh, that they flung their shadow far across and made the rock look green. An enormous shadow and darker than any winter cloud. Every shape and size of rock the same, as green as green. The white dust rose behind me as my boots struck the road. I was then but one mile and a quarter from the great place known as The Green Gate. Before long I saw the hill, and I remember I cried to myself, "There is the great hill."

"And there the very large field."

"And there the disintegrating hut, where I was told that Parry lay in wait, and watched for the girl to come from the back of that house. I climbed on, rested a while, climbed further, and suddenly there it was. The field, and at the end of it, the well she would walk to. So I went as near as near, and hid me under the hedge. From it I scanned the land

before me. I remember the air was somewhat cold to my face, and a stillness all about me, as though the world itself were exhausted by the heat of the day.

Suddenly I heard the call

“Olwen!”

‘Yes’ Goronwy said, ‘yes —’

‘There it was again. Ol—wen.’

The voice carried slow and heavy in that silent air.

She was stood there with the white pail clasped in her arms, and these were bare. And she came closer and closer still. That Olwen was of middle height, and slender, and her hair loosened. Nearer yet and I marked the bared neck, and then all her woman’s shape that had the dove’s softness.

‘Ol—wen.’

That came softer, and *stole* its way through the air.

I began to wonder then if she had seen me.

She had turned her head to the West, and then the South, and I knew her listening, and watching, too. Perhaps she had heard it before, and perhaps not. I saw the whole of the field where she would cross, and the well, and the rope, and the shining bucket there.

She had come out of a wide white gate, the rear entrance of The Green Gate, where lived the English lot that knew how to drive the Welsh before them. Now that hill was high, and on that evening as I looked down it might have been the very tip of the world. There was hidden in that hill, a man, and his name was Parry. Yes sir, folded and hidden in the long grass, the dead miner’s son. I lay quite still. Suddenly that girl was there, standing at the well’s low wall, and I saw the rope slack to her hand. And then I heard him speak. ‘Hello’ that Parry said.

And so his head came up, and as black as the coal that some—

times cushioned it in resting moments, or in the long waiting hours when dread stood fast. And shorter than his father, and ripe for any mine, or any part of that dark land, yet would not have it, and cleaved his way out just two years after the roof fell that struck another down.

I watched them, hidden, secretly, and they were near to one another. She stared at his eyes —

‘Then,’ thought Goronwy, ‘then that must be the glory that he watched.’

And at once he saw lip to lip, and the twining arms, and heard them laughing.

‘Yes, sir? You were saying —’

‘I think she saw it under his eyes, the dead forest’s mark, and there was one also on the right side of his jaw. And she saw his teeth, for that Parry was smiling. It was then that I heard them talking.

“You come by here yesterday” that Parry said.

“I did” she said.

“And the day before that and I wondered what your name was.”

“And I must come tomorrow, and every day after that” that Olwen said.

“You workin’ by here then:”

“I am indeed.”

She stretched out her arm then, and she put the bucket down.

And I saw his eye was on her, and holding fast.

“You do not know my name” Parry said.

“Nor I yours.”

“Pity indeed!” said that Parry, and his smile was as shining as the day.

“Where you workin’?”

"The Green Gate" Olwen said.

"Oh! — that lot," he said, and he tossed his head and looked away towards the house.

"You live by here then?" that Olwen asked him.

"No indeed. But funny you know, that old town where I live, why I like to come far out of it on a summer night —"

"And lie by this well then?"

"Well yes indeed, why not?"

And then he laughed, and he seemed emboldened, too, for he walked round that wall, and came and stood by her, though not too close. I saw him staring at her bare arms, and at her bared neck, and I think he looked lower than that, for I saw her hands come up then, and they crossed quickly. Yet in his sweeping glance was neither sin nor bribe.

"You live by here?" he asked, and she pointed to The Green Gate, and he saw a stately place, and many a tree round it.

Then he was closer still, and yet she did not move.

"The bucket now," Parry said. "I will fill it for you — Olwen."

"Well indeed" she cried, "I don't know. One week only I am here from Llanfair-ym-Muallt."

"Now fancy that" that Parry said, and he was hauling fast on the bucket.

I watched her watching him. She would have his shape of man, and his thew, and even where I was hid I had a rare view of Parry's legs, and somehow they seemed grown from the earth.

"Thank-you" said Olwen, and she took the bucket from his hand.

"I will carry it — yes," and there he was, his hand out for it, and he was pleading. "I will carry it for you, Olwen."

"You know my name?"

"Well yes, a pretty girl cannot hide her name, not in any town or country. It is *like* that. Three days you are here and I know it."

After a pause, she asked, "How then?"

He laughed again, and came still closer. "A little bird."

"Now only to that white gate" that Parry said.

"All right then, but no further," and together they walked back across the field.

'And did you follow *there*' was on the Cilgyn man's tongue, but he kept his silence.

"No water in that great house then?" asked that Parry, "and with the English there?"

"They like it from the well only" Olwen said.

They were by this white gate.

"I will help you tomorrow, Olwen," said Parry.

"Thank-you. Indeed you will not. There's check for you."

And he said again, "I will help you tomorrow."

"You will walk all the way from the town then?"

"I will walk it."

"You are in the mine then? I mind the marks there."

"I am out of the mine" that Parry said.

"And what then?"

And there, at that moment, Parry threw high his hands, and I saw the mouth that was wide to a smile

"Well mister?" asked Olwen.

"I am building a ship —"

"No! Indeed you are? By where then? At the sea?"

I saw her draw away from him then, for he leaned far too close her way. Yet I felt she remembered the smile, had caught it, and carried it down, far down, holding it safe, and wherever she then would go, perhaps she would carry it with her.

"I am not in the mine" said that Parry. And cried louder then.
"And I will not *be* in the mine. And I am not in the town,
and I will not *be* in the town. I am going into the far
world —"

"Ol—wen!"

"There now! They call. I am goin'. Thank you indeed."

"*Damn* them," I heard him say, and hot from his tongue.

"How big is the ship?"

She spoke so close to his ear that I knew he would carry home with him the smell of flowers and of hay, and of the sweet warm milk.

"*Mawr!*" he cried, and swifter from his tongue. "*Mawr!*
And it will be built of gold."

"Liar" she said.

And then they both laughed.

"I will be there tomorrow, and again I will carry your bucket, Olwen."

But she made no reply. She turned from him with a toss of her head, and then was gone through that white gate. I saw him stare after her, and go on staring. He did not know it, but two other eyes were watching him, and they were not Olwen's for suddenly I heard him swear and cry.

"English watch-dog" I heard him say, and he spat to the ground, and turned and went his way. Once or twice he stopped to look back, far back to that big house, where the English were.

"Duw!" he cried, "but that one is pretty."

I saw him go to the hut.'

'You followed him still?'

It came like a shot from Goronwy's mouth.

And he thought he heard that scholar say, 'I did indeed.'

* * *

“That hut was dark, and there was some rude shelving there, and a tiny hole that might have been a window, or a spy-hole, but he was not at the hole. He was flat upon that smelling floor, and I heard him call her name.

He said, “Olwen! Olwen!” And then I looked further in. His finger-tips were to his eye-balls. Perhaps he was dreaming then. Perhaps through those shut eyes he saw her clearer still, and he saw the ship and the sea she stood in. I came away then and I thought about him.

His dad was down, and far down, and his mam no longer young.

He had seen them both in the squat town, the bellowing town, and at night he might have caught its livid, fiery breath. And perhaps he remembered the grim shape that many a night called him, and many a morning, too, when the bed pulled. The ache was under the bone, sir, and against the town. The days would go by tumbril-like across his darkened floor. And always *behind* a man, behind his father, and under his mother.

I thought then, “he will fly from the town.”

At that very moment I heard him speak.

“I will go home” that Parry said.

And he got up and walked to the door, and for a second or two stood there looking far back at that now darkening house.

“Perhaps tomorrow” I said to myself, “that youth will walk far away.”

He left the hut, and turning sharp left, went across the field. Across another field, and down a lane, over a stile and a bridge, and another field. That Parry sang as he walked. Once he found himself some way back by the way he had come, and it was at a bridge. He stopped and wondered, and

knew it true by the shape and height of a certain lonely tree. Then *down* again he went, and there was the long road back to the roaring town.'

'And you behind him, sir?'

'And I behind him' said Sir Flook.

'Wherever he walked, I think that Olwen walked, for even his feet seemed dreaming. He walked faster towards the greyness that could not match with Olwen's smile.

Up three streets and round a bend, across a road and up two alleys. Then through a cutting, and there was his home. I saw him look one way and then another. And only brick met brick, and light, light. And Olwen shining in his mind. He knocked twice on his door, and there was no answer. And then he knocked again. And waited. The mist from the river was in that alley, too, and weaved about that Parry's head. I heard him speak.

"Sometimes when I go out mam will go out, too. Off to that Top Boot place. There's a fine place, mister, and my dad there too, once upon a time."

Sir Flook looked away from Goronwy.

'And again he knocked,' he said.

"There's mam" he cried suddenly.

It was very quiet there, and even I heard those feet upon the stairs, a creak in every one of them. That door opened, and there was Mrs Parry.

I listened hard, Mr Jones.

"Well! There you are" she said.

"Sorry mam, I am really."

"Supper's in the oven, boy, hurry now, there's late it is to be comin' in."

"Don't want it, mam" he said.

Sir Flook placed a hand on Goronwy's knee. "I heard him say it."

"Why ever not indeed" she piped back at him.

"Not hungry. Nos da, mam," and then he was running up the stairs.'

And you still there?' asked Goronwy. 'Watching. Listening?'

'I heard him close his bedroom door' said Sir Flook.

'And that night I believe he dreamed of the ship, and saw the star fallen close to the mast, that burst in flames about it.'

The clock struck two.

'I must go, sir' Goronwy said. 'And thank you. Some of it has been dream, and some has not - '

'Wait' cried John Humphrey, 'wait, sir. That is only the beginning.'

Goronwy did not answer.

'Moving towards that Green Gate was a man with a weight upon his back.'

Goronwy sat quite still.

* * *

He came with God upon his back.

One horrible, hurlling morning, came to the white gate at the back of The Green Gate.

And saw it through leaping greens of rain, a land spray.

And the wind cried like a man.

She was there with her hair knotted, and her face being cuffed.

In one moment he had her eye.

And in one day her smile.

And in five he had her heart, or so he thought.

In seven lifted the English from her tongue.

Blanted there like seed by travellers from Liverpool, and another place called Birmingham.

A cloud sat upon the Green Gate Chimneys.

And another on the barns.

From the white gate to a black door, a corridor walled by a stiffened hedge.

And that Book pressed hard upon the traveller's back.

An English mastiff mouthing air in a kennel.

He had the feel and the breath of the dog, and the smell of the dog.

"Have you a piece of an old loaf?" that Rhys asked.

"I have" Olwen said.

"And a drop of anything at all for this old can?"

Which came out of a long pocket and was blackened by fire.

"I have, sir" Olwen said.

And the can's wire handle shrieked, and the mastiff growled.

And then it barked dutifully for the English.

"Where will you go in a storm?"

"I will go to a barn" Rhys said.

"I always go to a barn" he said, seeing a hesitation in her.

"You're a tramp then, mister?"

No more than a light shrug of that Rhys's shoulder.

He saw her teeth in the rain, and the wind-clapped face.

And the hair, that more than matched his own.

"You have come far?"

"From Pentre Bach, that old Tom Watkins."

"No indeed! Why it is just by here then?"

"Indeed it is, missy. I work there" Rhys said.

"N—o" Olwen said, "not really?"

"Since last night only" Rhys said, and showed her all his teeth.

"Workin' at Watkins's place, and not living there then?"

"I like any old place, missy," he said.

Who was a prophet then, even without his mane.

And the words came out of one side of his mouth, and a smile from the other.

'And that was how he came by her' John Humphrey said.

'Go on, sir' said Goronwy, 'please go on.'

'Your bus has long gone' said Sir Flook.

'Damn the bus.'

'And it's a long walk to Cilgyn, and a frost coming down' he said.

'Damn Cilgyn.'

Goronwy looked away towards the window, and he waited, and he waited, and said nothing.

'And then that Rhys was silent, and then he drowned her with a look.

"You are from here then?" he asked that Olwen Hughes.

Then she said, no, she wasn't, but lived long miles away, and he asked where?

And she said, "In a pink cottage on a little back road, that split and broke the back of two great roads that went South and West, and only a mile walk from Swch y Rhiw —"

'Swch y Rhiw!' exclaimed Goronwy.

'The same' said Sir Flook, 'and not far from a place called Cynant, and another place called Cilgyn.

Then out of that black door came a voice like a rope, weaving round Olwen Hughes's neck, and pulling her inwards.

"Don't talk to a filthy tramp," the voice said.

And she said, "No, sir."

"And *never* talk to a tramp" cried another voice.

"No ma'am" that Olwen said

And left Rhys staring there, and she went her way.

"Clear off there, damn you," the male voice roared again.

Feet as heavy as lead coming out, and the heavy clank of a chain, and then the mastiff leaping for a tramp, who was

gone quickly, and God with him. Safely through a wood he went, then came out to high ground, climbed higher still, and came to a great field, and at its end the hut. And coming upon this, he entered like it was his home, and lay snug upon a fungoid floor, that earlier still, held a dreaming miner down.

Dreams are free, they cost no man anything, and that night she carried her own, as sweet and surprising as the last wild rose blown off an October hedge. Carried it with her up a long and winding staircase, until she came to an attic, and there she lay. Lay there and thought of two men. But not before she turned a great key in the lock, and knew her dream safe, and a darker thought had lightened. Which thought, sir, moved like a third foot beside her every night that she climbed to her bed. Away from a man that looked like a bear, and away from that man's voice. And as I said to you once before, that Olwen was dirt on this man's tongue, and gold on Parry's. And into the bright mirror of her mind would walk two men, the one from Cynant, and another from a recking town.

A man has the shape of Christ, and no more. And I have heard one say that the tramp carried a strong look of Him one wind-blown night, as he rose from behind a hedge outside an old woman's cottage. Frightened that poor dear nearly out of her wits, for she thought the Book was alive. But later he sang Job to her, and proved it wasn't. Two men pressing hard towards Olwen Hughes. I have no doubt at all that in that hour she lay there like a queen. Then suddenly into the dark of night came a song from Rhys, still flat upon his back on that earth-smelling floor, and I'm sure his eye was wide and clear upon her wind-cuffed face, and her blowing hair. A face he had not seen in many a day, and

never saw since, save the once, when blackened by sin. Who had seen the pale, gentle face of his mother as the first one in the world, which was in a dark corner of a stone place.

And the face of a giant father in the staggering light of a Saturday town.

And the face of the tame owl that moved silently for the mouse in his hand.

A man who lived in the light on all his days, and roamed about, and knew every level of the air.

And knew the face of every flower, and fern, and weed, and every tree, and every rock about, and every running child.

The heart filled, and so heavy and burdensome that he cannot sleep, but must be upon his feet and moving beyond the hut, and making a lane in the darkness for his feelings, and his eye hard upon that great house. Moving in the wood, and out, and around and about that Green Gate place, and back again. And every shining window is an eye that watches him. Hears an English mastiff growling in his dreams.

And, though he does not know it, her room is yet full of the bright light of her own dream, and full of a warmth at any time equal to a summer sun. Has the shape, and the feel, and the breath of the man about her.

That one who came by a well, up out of long grass, and that one who came to a white gate. Stared up at a blackened ceiling, and saw them both. One claimed by the darkness at an early age, who broke clear of the pit of the world, and cast his eye for far places by way of a golden ship.

Saw a hunchedness that no light could hide, saw how easy he could squat, and the tell-tale mark beneath the eyes, and knew him one with others in those dark places. Thought

how he went down tender, then came up with the loins of a lion. And heard him speak again, as he did by the well. Wondered where he was in this hour, and if he would come again. And then she saw that Rhys from Cynant.

The woman's fingers that held out a blackened can.
The child's smile in the man's face.

The hair that was made for the wind.

And the golden breast that marked him man.

Saw the great leather thongs that held the weight to his back, and dared not ask him what it was. Saw him smile, and heard him ask for the bread. And he was from a strange country, and of that she had no doubt.

Then laughed to think that she could play first with the one, and then the other, and each against each. And she rose at the crow of a cock, and the thought was still with her, and as warm as a new laid egg. Heard that mastiff bark, and knew that this was another day.'

Sir Flook lay far back in his leather chair, the head heavily hanging, the hands clasped loosely in a lap, but the fingers were never still, and seemed to spin and fashion the words that flowed like water from his mouth. And Goronwy sat motionless at the other side of the fireplace, and his hands pressed lightly on closed eyes.

And again he thought, 'Now some of this is dream, and some is not.'

For the miner had drowned in his own dream.

And she hag-bound from the day she heard the news.

That Mrs Parry crying at Gomer Ellis, 'the sea's a killer.'

The clock struck half past two.

'Are you listening, Mr Jones?'

'I am listening.'

'And he came back in the morning. That God-drawn man

was there at the white gate. Not wanting bread, and not swinging his black can.

Wanted nothing save a sight of the light in her own face. The English were in bed, for it was an early hour, but the bear was about. The bear leaned out of an upper window and he watched them talk. And he hated them, there and then, for he knew not what they said. Fully home in his Welsh was Rhys, and she had only strayed. And after a while she was right back in the country of her own tongue. And they went on talking. Suddenly he saw first the one, and then the other. They leaned far over that gate and kissed each other. Then he went away.

I drive my mind back to the time, my eye to the Green Gate. I ask myself what then was said.'

'What do you think?' asked Goronwy.

'I think this, Mr Jones. I think that Rhys asked her to marry him, and I think he would have told her that he would live with her in a wood, that they would build there, that he would fetch and carry and hunt, and in the evenings sing, and pray. That is what I think.'

'And the miner?'

'Him! God! I saw him four times, and each time he was on his knees, for he was mad a'bout her, and wished her gone with him, miles from that great house, and miles from a town. I heard him cry at her time and again, and I know that in that old hut, he first set light to the tail of his own dream. For did he not take her one fully blackened night, with not a star about, soundless save for the lowing of cattle, and the far off call of one dog for one bitch, at a distant farm.

The English out that night, the lot of them away in a carriage to some great affair, who never knew how the world blazed in a bleak and mouldering hut.'

'You sound tired, sir' Goronwy said, who ached for the end of a tale, and ached for a distant bed.

'One night that Mrs Parry came and I was glad to see her. And all of a long night we talked. And it was about her son, Olfyr. And then I shut my mouth, and I let her open her own. I listened. This is what she said.

A man from Rhos had driven fire to her son's head.

Who would take him to a ship standing in Swansea Bay.

She was afraid, she said.

Huw had undone her, and now he would, too.

He had run from the mine.

And never again would cast his eye that way.

And was determined.

Would fly from that town in two days and take with him a girl from Llanfair-ym-Mauellt, and that was Olwen Hughes. And set up his home in the distant place and sail away from there.

She begged and cried then, for so she told me.

Yet he said no, and no again, and that was the end for her.

The word was the key in the lock, and the lock turned.

She cried in this very room. Said how lonely she would be if he went.

And I had a mind to say to her, 'then why not go to Swansea, too, and live with them?'

The iron in her held fast to Huw, cold in a yard not one half mile from her place, and she would go no further, for her life was in that miner's town, and nowhere else.

The best in me leaned to her then, but she caught never a sight of it.

And many a night since then I've seen her in that Top Boot place.

And often I wondered why. And then of a sudden I knew.

Huw liked those places of an evening time, and there he laughed.

And hearing others laugh may sometimes lighten one's load. Then after a while she too, had learned to laugh.

And liked to sit where any miner sat.

Who was from that dark country, the closest she had known. She came here but one night only, and never again since then.' The clock struck three.

'You are tired, sir' said Goronwy. 'Enough now. I must go home.' Who did not want to move until that tale was out. 'I am not tired, Mr Jones.'

'It is nearly three o'clock in the morning, sir.'

'Sometimes I have sat here in this very chair, and I've talked to myself till five.'

'Let me make you a drink, sir' said Goronwy.

'Do you think, Mr Jones, that what I tell is a dream?'

'No sir.'

'Then I am glad of that.'

'I have a long walk before me' said Goronwy, and he bent down and picked up his hat.

Sir Flook rose from his chair, he caught Goronwy's hand.

'It is good of you to sit listening to an old man. Of course I know you were a bard. Once a bard, always a bard, and they never fished for stones.'

'Meaning?'

'You are fishing now, Mr Jones. Then if you come to the Top Boot tomorrow I will tell you the rest of the tale. That Mrs Parry will be there, and she may add her own. Or if not that Top Boot place, then The Blue Boar. Those who travel to these places go for the light and laughter there, Mr Jones. The brick and stone of God's house is no less intact account of that.'

'That is very true, sir, though some think otherwise.'

'I will show you the door.'

'It does not matter' protested Goronwy, seeing extreme of tiredness in old Sir Flook.

'It does matter' said the scholar, 'but it does matter.'

And he doddered around Goronwy until they came to the door.

And still he held the hand.

'What a sad and clutching man' thought Goronwy, and wondered when that Sir Flook would free his hand.

'Nos da.'

'Nos da.'

And Goronwy walked away from that darkened and mysterious house.

He heard the loud slam of that Penybont-ar-Ogwr door.

'It is still hard to know just what is dream in that man's mind, and what is not.'

And there was the miner climbing in his mind, there that Mr Parry, the man from Cynant, and the girl from Llanfair-ym-Muallt.

'A drama in three acts of Rhys The Cloud' he thought. 'No. It will be ten songs with the harp.'

His shadow danced before him down the long, white road.

Thoughts rose as light as bubbles in his head.

Imagined that turning a sharp corner now, he should suddenly come upon that lost man, stood quiet by a tree, as once he used to do.

'Suppose it happened' thought Goronwy.

And doubt laughed back at him.

He stopped and stared about him. To his right the towering mountain, to his left, the woods. Stood listening hard, and

wondered where he was. In this very moment, on a mountain road.

Yesterday a man, today a tale.

Suppose he found him under a high hedge, back bent over the blackened can, the hair like a wave.

Or found him in some darkened corner of a field, and heard the words that were soft as water.

Or heard him singing from the depths of the deep wood.

Or passing some closed Inn, heard the voice within.

The more he delved, the less the reason in it.

Cilgyn his haven.

Two things would drive him from it.

A mad dream.

An appointment with the stranger.

A horse neighed at a gate.

A dog barked.

And telephone wires sang out their own strange, ragged tube.

That old Cilgyn clock was striking five when Goronwy turned his key.

There was the song of Cilgyn when the light came, and then the children's song.

And the light came, and the news was anywhere on bare ground.

Not found.

The rock he sheltered under, bare.

The barn he lay in, silent.

Goronwy looked down from his topmost window, and he saw it all.

Cilgyn was a green horseshoe, green the mountain round. And straight down its centre sat Trevor Powell's row of houses, built for Lilliputians, or for dolls, but real people live inside them.

Watched fore and aft by that Goronwy Jones, because his house is dead-centre in that row. And if his windows are bright eyes, it is only because he is always cleaning them, on duty or off.

And green as the horseshoe is, not even a ghost of a horse about.

That Mervyn, Tractor, says that he brought hippophobia to Cilgyn.

Where the best nails lie in any horseshoe stand two Cilgyn sentries, and always watching.

God's house at one end, and Huw Ellis's place at the other.

And coursing between the two, the life of Cilgyn, that is its river, but on Sundays the traffic is one way only.

Cilgyn knows that Welsh is by instinct in the Chapel, and by instruction in the school, and in Huw Ellis's place it might be diplomatic.

And the Post Office bell is so loud you can hear it on Ynys Seiriol.

It woke Goronwy when it rang, after two hours sleep, so he got up.

He washed and dressed himself and had his breakfast.

And the first thought in his head was of the children, for they were the grace of Cilgyn.

He put on his blue coat and his shiny cap. He bent down and polished his brutal boots.

And slowly he walked out of his house, and got the sight and feel and shape of a new day.

The air of the morning was grave, and he met its mood.

He passed many things.

A farrier at his black door, and a blacker cloud within.

The dead anvil and the blackened fire.

'Bore da!'

'Bore da, Mr Jones.'

Passed that tight man from the holding, and a bucket on his arm.

In it two of the brownest eggs that policeman ever saw.

'Bore da, Mr Jones.'

'Bore da.'

Goronwy paused and looked up, his eye following many skeins of blue-curling smoke from Cilgyn chimneys.

And other skeins around Goronwy's mind, and those Sir Flook's.

'My head's a web, and that John Humphrey is my spider.'

The scholar's tale yet wound and wound about him.
And higher than the curling smoke, a most confounding
sky.

'Cilgyn is more silent than the tightest shut mouth.'

Gone.

And that was the word he spelt on this bare ground.

And the morning beginning to stretch itself.

And Mrs Lewis, Post Office, taking down two shutters that
might be biers.

'Bore da, Mr Jones.'

'Bore da.'

Past Iolo's grandmother's cottage, its blue-sashed windows
the brightest dress it ever wore.

Slowly on, with a heavy tread, and one hand resting in
another, behind his back.

'Written in the air' Goronwy said. 'Not found.'

Eyes to the ground, and sometimes looking up. Then far
away, then this and that, and past Huw Ellis's door.

And past God's house.

Then stood and watched carefully, as though suddenly
around a corner someone would be down on him.

And listening, and waiting for words in the air.

Remembering the last words he heard from an old woman.

'The sort of man the wind would follow after, to whirl his
hair.'

And that was Iolo's grandmother, who, on some cold nights,
had shared the book with Rhys.

Goronwy looked at a black board. Wind-beaten, and the
top sealed by a gilt cross.

And nothing on the board. No name, nor hour, nor
plan.

And no call.

God hidden.

Past Meurig's place, with green-sashed windows, and inside four bright eyes, and two were Meurig's, looking out.

He waved a heavy hand.

Goronwy waved.

Past Will Evan's shop, and a host of smells coming up.

A smell of apples and a smell of oil.

A smell of bread and a smell of soap.

'Bore da, Mr Jones.'

'Bore da.'

'No news?'

'No news.'

'Pity,' Will said.

Will Evans happy with his sugar mound, the blue bags towered beside him.

The heavy feet went by.

'If that sugar were sand, and any size of castle hovering, Will Evans could not be happier than a boy.'

For Goronwy had noted the length and breadth of a morning smile.

And down the hill, and a sound coming up, an old sound, and yet a new one.

A fast-running brook, and then the sea.

Goronwy stopped, for here was Cilgyn's school.

A morning light upon the windows, and bright lights within.

'The best light comes from the faces there. That Sir Flook is right.'

He stared at the white gate and the low wall, and then the long, low hedge. It glistened from many a shining web. A green ship carrying spiders.

Goronwy leaned.

A sound like a flute, and then the double-bass.

'Pay attention there, Olfyr Richards,' Miss Lewis said.

And the double-bass growled after her.

'The word is LLAW.'

'Yes, Mr Hopkins,' that Olfyr said.

'Shout man, shout then,' growled the double-bass.

And Olfyr cried, 'Llaw, aw, law, baw, daw, ddaw.'

Goronwy stood very still, and he caught the words.

Of a sudden he had one leg in Cilgyn, and the other was in Maesaleg.

And he was a boy then, and he, too, was singing.

The desks were low at Maesaleg, the slates were big.

Goronwy cried as he read.

'Cae, cael, gael, chacl.'

And, 'Wy, bwy, bwyd, fwyd, llwyd, and lwyd.'

And, 'Sy, sydd, dydd, ddydd, bydd, and fydd.'

He sang with others from behind his slate.

'Dyn mawr mawr yw'r cawr.'

When the double-bass growled again, Goronwy's slate was clean.

And two legs stood by Cilgyn school.

'The word is, rhai, the first word is rhai. Sing up then, Ifor Jones.'

'Yes, sir.'

And Ifor cried. 'Rhai, ai, tai, llai, mai.'

'Again'

'Again' said the flute, and that was that Miss Lewis, tall and bony.

'Yes, Miss Lewis. Rhai, ai, tai, llai, mai.'

The baban cried, 'Tân, yn y tŷ.'

There were in this school, the little girls and the little

boys, and at the back, the big ones. And there was one who dreamed. And he was the double-bass's brightest child.

Idris his name was, and Mr Hopkins loved him. And sometimes he would watch other boys go out, then signal to his little star, the finger high for him.

'Wait, Idris.'

'Yes, Mr Hopkins, sir.'

And the room was cleared of all, save Mr Hopkins and a dwarf's son.

Outside, in the grim yard, of Victoria's time, the others ran and shouted. And flung and climbed and rolled, and laughed and sang the minutes down.

The double-bass would speak, and his voice gentle.

Mr. Hopkins would sit close to the boy who would go far, and carried by his dreams.

'What is a word, Idris?' and close to Idris's ear.

'A word is clay in the hand, Mr Hopkins, sir.'

'Good. Very good.'

Idris would stare out through the window, and wherever he looked, the mountain stared him back.

'Yesterday we talked of words, Idris.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then go on.'

'Yes, Mr Hopkins, sir.'

Goronwy inched along, then stood fast. Through this window he saw clearly where the little ones sat, and where the big ones, and then his eye was on the dreamer.

Mr. Hopkins bent close to the boy.

'A word is *many* things, Idris —'

'Yes, sir' Idris said, gravely.

'What did I say yesterday? And to none other than you will I say it again.'

'A word is a rock, and a spear, and fire in the mouth' cried Idris.

'Go on.'

'And a wound, and a flower, and a bare bone —'

'Yes?'

'And light and darkness, and running water, and dead water, too, Mr Hopkins.'

'Good! Good! You will go far from Cilgyn, Idris.'

'Will I, Mr Hopkins, sir?'

And a brave smile, but Mr Hopkins did not see it. For out of a corner of his right eye he was watching Goronwy watch.

'What a Cilgyn policeman will hear, will do him no harm, and perhaps good.'

Then closer still to that Idris.

And in his mind as suddenly as light, a picture of the dwarf, his father.

'He may one day founder in his own fires, but his father will do so only on bent bones. Strange! From the dwarf springs a bright star.'

Then closer again to Idris.

'The word for the soil is *hammer*, and for the rock beneath it, *break*, and for the long winter days, *hard*, and for what lies cold to the forehead at the day's end, *sweat*.'

'Yes, Mr. Hopkins, sir' Idris said.

He was erect and alert, his eye lively and his ear sharp.

For Mr Hopkins was from Ffnnant, back of Llangwm, by Cynwyd, and he was a god with words.

And every day, for a whole hour, they played with the words, and they loved them.

'Your father is high on the hill, and he came there in a lean year. The one following was leaner, and harder than he'd known in many a day, and that farm mean —'

'Yes sir.'

'And you christened the little farm, Idris?'

'Yes, Mr Hopkins, sir.'

'And you called it by a true name.'

'The Year of the Wolf, sir' Idris said.

'And that was good, Idris, and when I first heard of it, I knew it was a sign.'

'A sign, Mr Hopkins, sir?'

'A sign that you will move far from Cilgyn. You will climb to high places, but your father will go down.'

'Yes, sir' Idris said.

And wondered on his father, and wondered if he would.

And what it meant.

And wished to cry then in some far-hidden corner.

And shouted in his mind, 'down, down, down, down, down.'

And loved the word, and hated it, and felt the power there as he held it.

'Down, Mr Hopkins, sir?'

Dread was sweat upon his tongue.

'Down, Idris, D O W N.'

'And —' Idris began, but Mr Hopkins raised the judge's hand.

'Na ddigon! Run into the yard now, Idris. Play there. Soon I shall ring my bell.'

Idris rushed from the room, and soon was lost, one head among many heads.

And thought he held a dwarfed father against his child's breast.

Then found his far-hidden corner, and there he wept.

'One day that child will be a bard.'

But with his harp alone that is the golden mouth of Wales.'

Mr Hopkins got up and walked quickly back to his desk, and stood there. Goronwy's eye was on him, and now he held the bell, and waited for the tick of a clock.

'A good teacher indeed, that Mr Hopkins, the best we have in Cilgyn. And had he been in Cynant, could he have struck a pearl from Rhys's wooden head?'

And he went on.

Past the school, and around the back of it, and glancing over a wall. He watched the little ones play. And then he stopped and stared.

'They have lost their Uncle Rhys.'

He went away, back by the same land and path and road. Past Will Evans again, then stopped to talk to a man coming out of the shop, and it was Rowland Richards, sharpest farmer in this place.

'Not a bit of news then about old Rhys, Mr Jones?'

'Not a bit, Mr Richards, not a tiny little bit at all.'

'Pity! Around this time on a clock I'd see that Rhys the Wound waitin' by theic, and at twelve the bell clangs, and his subjects all about him, and every hand at his pocket for a sweet. And laughin' with them, and then runnin' their ways, and promising fairies and bird's eggs, and an old song, and a run by the river, and things like that.'

'It is strange indeed' Goronwy said.

'A great pity! Well now — good-day to you, Mr Jones. I'm off.'

And he was, and so headlong and hurried and wild in his movements, and kicking everything from his path, it was like the last cheque from the Marketing Board had come his way. 'He was once away a whole month. Now that is still a hold, and one may grasp the thought,' thought Goronwy.

Then the bell clanged in Hopkins's hand, and the child-

ren ran from the school. And one, and then another saw Goronwy and they came crowding round him.

* * *

‘Well hello Mr Jones!’

‘Hello then’ cried Goronwy, and watched them making rings about him. Nine were laughing, and only one looked sad, and she a little girl.

‘Hello Arianwen’ said Goronwy, and with a light finger he lifted a curl from off her forehead, and looking down at her, he forgot the others.

‘Has Uncle Rhys gone away then, Mr Jones?’ Arianwen asked.

And about one finger she wound and wound a handkerchief, and it was suddenly string.

‘They say he has indeed, dear.’

She counted all the shining buttons on Goronwy’s coat.

Then she gave one quick, bold look at that policeman.

‘Where then?’

Then that Selwyn drowned an answer with his high-pitched voice.

‘There’s a fine shine on your boots, Mr Jones’ he shouted.

All eyes were downwards then, and even Goronwy looked.

‘I don’t know, dear’ Goronwy said his hand on Arianwen’s head.

‘But I think he truly went for a long walk and forgot the time.’

Will Evans’s Geraint shot words at the policeman.

‘Sometimes he used to hide him behind the big elm at Hengoed, and then he’d jump out at you *quick*, and catch

you. Once he threw me into the air and caught me comin' down. It was funny, with his hair blowin'.'

'It wasn't funny when he caught *me* up' Arienwen said.

Wasn't it, dear. There's a pity.'

'The English lady locked her barn door because when he was there he messed.'

And that was from Caradoc Roberts from Ty Cerrig, who once stole a loaf off that Will Evans's shelf, and ran all the way in the rain without stopping, till he came to the red barn back of Arosfa, and gave it to Rhys the Wound and the Cloud.

'He was scratchin' hisself.'

'He was *what*?'

'Scratchin' hisself.'

Goronwy bent far down to Caradoc, for he was no bigger than a sixpence. He heard the words more clearly then, piped hotly into his ear.

'He was a lovely whistler' cried Megan Hughes, 'I heard him, Mr Jones.'

'Did you, dear?'

'Once he took a robin from his pocket that was hurted in the road.

It was warm. He gave it to me.'

And that was Evan Jones, and shouting all the time.

'Yes, and I put the robin back in the hedge, the hawk was watchin' then.'

'Well! Just fancy that.'

He walked their way, and some linked arms with him.

'Maybe knocked down by a train on that Bonwm line,' little Hugh said.

'*Clever* little Hugh,' Goronwy said, and pinched sharply on his ear.

'Ow!'

'Will we be searchin' again, Mr Jones?' and that was Arianwen again.

'I don't know, dear. Perhaps, perhaps not.'

Then they forgot Rhys, and swung and skipped about Goronwy, and sang their wordless songs, and were as happy as the day.

'Off now' cried Goronwy, and they were off, running all their ways home.

And he walked on.

And there, on a cold stone hard by his door, sat Huw Ellis.

'Bore da, Mr Jones.'

'Hellow Huw Ellis. And how is the man today?'

'I am two men this morning, Mr Jones' Huw said, 'and both are sad.'

He got up and walked into his place, and left Goronwy cold.

'I wonder what my eyes would widen on' thought Goronwy as he went his way.

Back to his own place, and sat quiet in his little room, and waited for the woman named Bronwen Prothero. She came. Hatless, and grey wisps flowing. A clumsy walk. Asthmatic cough, and two rheumy legs.

'There you are then' said Goronwy.

'I will see to things, Mr Jones' she said.

'Diolch.'

Goronwy opened his blue exercise book and he began to write.

Second report of Goronwy Jones, Station House, Cilgyn.
Policeman, and retired bard. (Written in his own time.)

* * *

One whole week missing now, and shall I write in my book,
Dead?

Not yet. Hope is still a claw, and it is sharpening.

Reports coming in all the time, and each one blacker than
the other.

Not heard of. Not seen. Not found.

Not seen at Berwyn or Derwyn.

Nor Tynant nor Cynant.

Nor Corwen. Or Cerrig or Carrog or Pentrevoclas or Bettws.

Nor Bonwm. Or Llangwm, Garthmclho or Macrddy.

Bronwen Prothero who works for me, says she met one of
the Mean Ones in the lane and he was leading a grey mare.
And he said to her, 'old tramp turned up yet?' and she said
nothing.

And less than nothing. And that was truly right.

Sat on his backside there since the Act of Union.

That Rhys is truly vanished.

A glass of ale on any pub mantlepice, and a waiting can of
tea and some bread in any cottage, but not a sight nor a
sound of that man.

Not a single sound from Bwlch to Swch.

Mystery.

And if Mystery had a neck, I'd break it, just to let the secret out.

Pugh Williams, Sion House, says if no word of Rhys in one month, then a service for him in the Chapel Sunday.

Went to an old woman with her Book out on Elijah, and had to tell her, too.

No. Not found yet.

Her old bones shook, and I went away.

Will Evans says a friend of Rhys insured him for tuppence a week in that Prudential lot, though that Rhys doesn't know it, and wouldn't want it.

'Any old hole for me' he cried, and that was long ago.

Glad I met a man named John Humphrey.

Glad I met a woman name of Parry.

Glad I met that Tommy Hughes.

Again I will catch the green bus for that Saturday town.

From cottage to cottage, from house to house, and from farm to farm, the rows is out.

No. Not found.

And the cries in your ears as you go.

Who will pile my hay in the harvest time?

Who will watch Megan while I go to market?

Who will mend my wheel?

Who will carry a message over the mountain in hard weather, to an old woman down in her bed forever with paralysis?

Who will mind Arianwen while I go to the Whist?

Who will clean out God's house for nothing when the cleaner's ill?

Who will clean out Huw Ellis's yard?

Who will clean the doctor's car?

Who will talk beautifully to a child?

Or sing more nobly with Iolo's grandmother on a lonely night?

Who will dig a grave when rheumatics saddle Watkin's bone?

Who will come to a back door at the dark of night and look like a prophet?

And lie patient as the heifer till her time comes, and help her out?

And who will ever again throw that bastard Welshman from Rhos over a hedge?

'All this bloody fuss' I heard a man say at that Top Boot place last night.

And right he is. In Cilgyn we like to fuss over a man. For a man's a man, and Rhys was finer than fine, as that Ifor says.

His first years were stones.

And then he grew his hair and was free, and his days as bright as apples, and in Cilgyn was as happy as the day was long.

Buried that Olwen in his gravity. Retained but one scar only.

Livid down his mind that day, but long since healed.

Saw a man name of Parry fast to a fungoid floor, and ploughing in new country that was as white as snow and as soft as down.

Hoped even then, like the child he was.

And it a brighter bubble than he knew.

Till it burst in Tym's, barber shop, and out of it shot the cloud.

How urging my ear for the summer tale.

How urging my hand for the notes in a book.
'Your bloody notes' cried Huw Ellis, 'damn your notes.
Find the man.'
God Almighty knows I wish I could.
And hold him by his hand, and lead him in.
And shout the mountain round.
Found! Found!
Bring in Pugh Williams's God-drawn man.
And old Women's dearest friend.
And Buffalo Bill for the children.
And 'Whistling One', too.
I will *not* write dead.
A knock on my door. I must stop now. (But not before he
wrote again),
I will not say Dead.

* * *

It was that Mr Williams. Sion House.
'Come in, Mr Williams, sir, come you in. Welcome
always.'
'Hello Mr Jones. I will sit.'
'Well Mr Williams, sir?'
'I heard a woman say, she was from Brondalu, that that
Rhys maybe made a will.'
And then Goronwy roared.
Ha ha ha ha ha!
'A will, Mr Williams, sir. That man? No indeed
Then he cries loudly, 'why yes, written on an old sack,
perhaps, and that is all.'
'It does not seem as though —'
'I will not give him up yet, Mr Williams. Only one week,
you know.'

'You would not be a policeman if you did, Mr Jones. Nevertheless —'

'I will not say Dead' Goronwy said.

'Soon, Mr Jones, the great snows will come. That you know.'

'I do indeed.'

'Supposing God has taken him then? Think you of any happier man in Paradise?'

'I will not say Dead, Mr Williams, I will not say that word.'

'No?'

'No.'

'Yet if *found* dead, Mr Jones?'

'Then I will believe it when I see the Cloud of hair as flat as my hand.'

'You are a good man, Mr Jones. I know that. Each night I think of that Rhys, and I pray for him.'

Goronwy wanted to say, 'and so do I,' but his tongue locked quickly.

Pugh Williams, Sion House, went out.

Goronwy took his book and put it in the drawer, and he locked the drawer.

He took down a black ledger, and it was marked, 'Duty'. He read from this.

Summons for Roberts, Two Gates, without a light on his bicycle.

Destroyed Bryn Derwen's mad dog, name of Balchter.

Impounded one stray ewe, looks like it belongs to that tight man from the holding. Any grass cheaper than his own. That kind of man.

Cautioned Davies and that Mari Jones, bundling too near Chapel late at night.

Inspected gun licences at the Mean One's place.

Collected Mrs Vaughan's, and Mrs Thomas's pension from Post Office.

Collected one gun from Mervyn Hughes, who can't pay the licence.

Instructed Mrs Prothero to contact Inspector Hughes, Llangar, about a rise in her wages.

Five people complaining about that Trevor. No water in their houses.

Set a trap for that Lewis's new Austin.

See about new rat traps for week-end.

Goronwy closed the book.

The kettle was boiling, so he had his tea.

Changed out of his uniform to his best suit, and shaved again.

And looked through a window at the waning light.

And thought of the summer tale, and of that scholar from the back road.

And of Mrs Parry waiting at the Top Boot.

Wondered if he'd writ a drama about that Rhys, and send it off to next year's National at Newtown, for a prize.

Then thought, 'No, a long poem,' remembering longer ones of his youth.

Or a diary like that Kilvert man.

Or ten poems with the harp.

When the clock struck five the darkness was moving down the mountain.

Along a hidden back road a green bus would be moving.

And he hadn't left his house two minutes before one woman said to another, behind muslin curtains, 'off again he is.'

'The way he sneaks him out of the place.'

'In at six this morning. Heard him. There's sly in a policeman.'

'Courtin'.'

'Or worse.'

And one man heard Goronwy's feet pounding down the hard white road.

And the green bus *grinds* away for the Saturday town.

And he was on it.

And it heaved like a ship.

The sun came out of his mouth.

Around six of the clock it was, in that Huw Ellis's place.

Where men may talk and laugh when the day is over.

Keep private in their mind the seriousness for Sunday.

The tale of life and death, and other kingdoms.

The tightest mouth in all Cylgyn wide open now, surprising all.

Mostly that Huw Ellis who sat with Olwen on the stroke of five.

And had his tea, to warm a colder mood.

'This day I heard the first faint crack of Winter's bone' Huw said.

But no answer from that Olwen. Perhaps it was cold enough.

'You were going to say something to me' Huw Ellis said, for he had seen her mouth open, and then shut again.

'Tell then.'

'He's gone forever,' Olwen said.

'Strange indeed.' The same little stone lay on my tongue, Olwen, girl. I said to myself, 'he'll never come again.'

Five long, silver chimes from the clock, and he was up, and to his bar.

Lighted the fire and the flames crawled up the bricks.

The oil lamps, and the strong smell came, and the warm, golden light.

So after a while the cold was out and the warmth was in.

And shortly after the first of his customers.

Who sat him down, and watched Huw Ellis behind his counter.

Saw him take a big glass jug from a hook on the wall, and watched him smash it to fragments on the floor.

Then he swept up the bits of Rhys's glass, and flung them to a yard.

'P'nawn da, Huw.'

'Hello.'

The big man sat to his usual place.

'What you always have, Mervyn'

'Yes, the same,' said that tight man from the top holding.

And Huw gave him the pint of shandy.

The same questions, and the usual answers, and then a bit of talk.

'See Jones away on the bus again,' Mervyn said.

'Chasin' round a town for a man's tale' said Huw.

Mervyn Roberts said nothing.

'More interested in Rhys dead than alive now' Huw said.

'Heard about it' Mervyn said, and, unusual with that tight mouth, it laughed. 'Giving his bardic bones a last bloody shake, I suppose.'

'That's it. Silly. Vanity in him. Wasn't ever much at it, anyhow.'

'Stuck in every pub in that Saturday town' Mervyn said, 'say his claws are everywhere.'

'True enough. And that old codger that used to teach Rhys, loosening up his tongue all the while. Anything for a drink. That's the way of it.'

'That Mrs Parry, too, though heaven knows there's not much harm in her.'

'P'nawn da.'

And another one was in, and sitting down. Huw served him.

Another, and then another one.

The clock struck six, the door opened again, and there was the fifth and the last that late October night.

All served by Huw, all stretching themselves, all easing themselves up.

And the glasses went down, and the eyebrows went up the very moment that tight man opened his mouth.

Then all of a summer day came out of it.

* * *

'The fetching and finding and fathering time it was, high above that little dove of a place called Llangwm,' Mervyn said.

'A fine mountain.'

The green of the sea gone out of it, and down a thousand throats.

And what was left burned and scarred by the ball of fire.

Along the paths and slopes the same, as torn and wrinkled as an old face.

I was up early that morning, long before cock crow it was, up with many a man on the stroke of five, and the sun was driving then. The blazing light of it on many a house, and many a face that morning. And on the tops, cruel with its killing fire.

On that high place a thousand eyes closed against it.

Against a too long drowning in it.

Everyone of a flock sent flying for hole, and shade, and haven.

And there they lay, panting, yet cool.

Why I'll remember that day till the day I die, the sun was drunk and generous.

As fat and yellow and warm as the hay I found him in.
That Rhys man it was, come twenty seven then, and maneless around that time.

Walked him many a mile through the cool of the night.
Strode high and fine through many a secret place, that only a shepherd and a prophet knows.

Walked through the darkness into the light, and kicked the miles away.

And I knew where to find that man.

The telegraph line was from pub to pub.

And on Sundays chapel to chapel.

In an old black barn not quite five miles below Maerdy.

Coming to it I saw light in many a hole, the sun greedy and pitting his eye to every nick and crack of Morgan's barn.

Round six o'clock it was, knew without bell or watch.

I called to him and I kicked in a door.

'Bore da, Rhys' I called.

A great fat yawn out of him.

Who, when I kicked that door, was lying there as happy as happy. Curled like a squirrel, and a whole mantle of hay to hide the man. When he turned over I saw his sleep-drowned eyes, and in each of them, a tiny scrap of light where the sun had found him.

And how he rolled, and lounged, and eased in the hay mound.

Rich as the bed of a king, and a damned sight warmer.

'Bore da,' he said, un-curling.

Stretched full out, and up came his arms like sails.
Yawning again, and some hay fell away from him.
Saw the deeps and the strength of his chest, bare as the day
he was born.
Golden as the bed he lay in, warm as a pussy-cat.
I sat down then, and I watched him.
Saw man, and lamb, and tiger in his frame.
'Time to go' I said.
Another lovely yawn.
As though all the time in the world were his, and oceans
more to come.
Rose up to his great height, then stretched again, singing.
Bit of something from his school-days.
We went outside then and he was on to breakfasting.
The moment he made tea and broke his bread, the birds
were after him.
All of them knew his name I'm sure of that.
Cursed him when he picked up a lost worm in the road, and
thanked him when he flung it to a hedge.
I shared his tea and his bread, not that I wanted it, but he
would have it that way. Then it was time to go, and away
we went.
Booted with gold in every field we crossed.
Milk would be rich that day, cows lost in buttercups.
A ballooning of old crows as we climbed, and rabbits
flying.
I watched that man as we went up, watched the side of his
face, and it was grave there as it always was, though mind
you I've heard him laugh.
The devil in me nudged. I thought of easing it.
For who hadn't known of the girl he was after.
Pretty little queen, they said, from the mid-country.

'How's the courtin', Rhys?'

No answer.

'Wasn't there, I expect, and you waited all of a long night behind the spinney.'

Silence.

'She never came?'

'No' he said, and you'd have had to bend close your ear to hear it.

'Suppose she's just a bitch, like the rest of them' I said.

His mouth closed like a trap.

The lines gone deeper through his gravity, so I shut myself up.

Still climbed.

Stopped sometimes and threw ourselves on our backs.

And the way he flattened himself, the way he went to the ground.

Like the tiger in the zoo, like that one I once saw in a circus.

Rich in his movements in the destroying cage.

At least a million bees hummed over our heads, shaved close to you, the humming like the fast cutting from hot, dry blades.

The weighted gorse bursting and yielding where it stood, and seeds spitting over many a mile.

We lay and we didn't care about anything at all, and worried not.

I remember there was lying at the mouth of the sun, or so it seemed to me, so high and still it was, an old buzzard.

Saw the mouse's legs glide through hot grass, at that great height.

Kinging it up there, biding his time.

There was Rhys, stretched and motionless, arms spread out, staring up at the sun.

Could never have done it myself, except through spread fingers.

Heat rolled over like waves.

'Cool enough then?' I said.

'I am watching a bird' Rhys said, who would not stir.

'We must get on.'

'Wait' he said, 'you'll see him come.'

And right he was, for in that moment down the buzzard came.

A sharpened point of fire, for the sun was following him. Fell to dry grass and was still, then swooped, and so quick away no eye could find him.

'Right' I said, and I was up, and he after me, and again we were climbing.

A thousand white blobs on a far stretching mountain, like snow-drops woken too soon, and soon we'd be gathering them in, and driving them, and driving them.

The whole lot of fine flock, and their homes stretched from Flint to Mont.

We heard the distant bawling on the roads, and knew that soon we should walk into that Morgan man.

Morgan and the rest of them, all of them men of the sheep. Knew the wool and the bone as well as their own hand.

'Listen' Rhys said.

We listened.

A voice like a great horn, rolling downwards, then round and round, then soaring and falling again, and only one voice like it in all that mountain country. That Morgan man who keeps a Free House eight miles above Tynant.

A gorgeous man he is. And then we heard his dogs.

'Not far to the cross-roads now' I said.

Rhys nodded. I did not press too near to that man, I did not covet anything. But left him with the thoughts that ringed him round.

Knew a girl lay in the pit of them.

Five pubs knew he'd kill a dwarfish miner, if he caught hold of him.

Never knew in what part that Rhys would strike, in one county today, and another tomorrow. He'd walk the feet off any man.

Now a great roar from the tops, and long after you could hear the echo of it, a huge sound, a mountain sound.

Like something snapped in the depths all of a sudden.

Or some strange animal in that high country.

We stood again, listening. I looked at Llewynhuan's son.

'A man calling' he said to me, 'I know him well.'

But I didn't and I asked who it was.

'Owen Hughes from Bala town' he said.

We came on Morgan standing in the middle of the road, the white of it struck your eyeballs under the murdering light.

Never forgot he was a sergeant-major, never, gave us our orders quick, so I went one day, and Rhys another. And all the morning we were gathering them in.

The dogs so clever you could have loved them forever. Knew things long before we did, smelt something in a hole any distance off, and the next minute that dog at the sheep's heels. In one hour you could look anywhere, and there was a great white mass moving in one direction, down to cooler valleys, and the strong sheep smell came before them, and you'd think a snowfield was on the move, sliding down the steep sides of the burnt mountain. And the barking of the

dogs: You couldn't hear yourself speak. On and on it went, and I suppose they liked hurraing their own clever ways. Come on one of a sudden, flat out and stretched, his tongue half a yard long, his old tail smashing to dry ground, the wild eye, the quick, sharp breathing of him.

Later you saw the pattern working. Men were moving downwards in the shape of a half moon, and so were sheep. And far below many were waiting for them.

Around noon we had them safe and tidy, penned in, and the dogs licking their masters' heels. Met Rhys later in a place called The Heron.

'Here tomorrow?' I asked him'

'No' he said, 'picking up my pence, and moving off for another place.'

That's how it was with him, always. No man's master and no man mastering him, for too long that is.

'Where you making for?'

'Back of the Holy Well' Rhys said.

'A long way off from the girl' I said.

'There are a hundred ways of coming behind the back of a man' he said.

I knew what he meant. And I knew he might get drunk that night.

Walking home that evening I come upon him standing in the road.

Didn't surprise me at all. There he was talking away with the tea kings.

Have you ever seen the kings of tea?

* * *

Now the kings of tea are so solid and bold a lot, that you could never miss seeing them, in any line of country, and

even in the dark of night you'd see them, too. And more than one way of looking at them.

I always look at them, I like looking at them. They drink their tea black, out a blacker can, and if you gave them a nice white cup, it's more than a guess that they wouldn't know how to hold it.

A tea king is any one of a group of men stood in a kind of holy circle on any stretch of road that some Council has decided to pull up, or put down. And as sure as sure they'll be stood around their old chariot, and it's a tribe of men that can't be without its chariot. Watch that company move out from its secret stable, the mysterious yard hid away some back place by a Council lot, that does mysterious things, and has mysterious ways.

Moves off like a caravan you would see in that Arabian land, tented and tarpaulined and belted up, the lot of them, and the man in the chariot as black as your hat from the first to the last hour of the day. Hid behind his flapping bit of sail, and moving on, slower than a funeral, but mighty sure of getting somewhere in the end.

The bit of old road that the surveyor skidded over yesterday in his fine bouncing car, and marked on a map in a little office to be built up or torn up, as the case may be.

There's the ceremony of moving out, and that of moving along, and that of arriving there, and that of settling in. And everything must be just so with a tea king, same as with anybody who sits on a Council.

Well there were seven beshawled old men, huddled close and talking in their strange, mumbling way about the mystery of God knows what. A secret society couldn't have done it better. And what was surprising to me, that Rhys in the middle of them all.

Seven men of a tribe that were born with sacks around their shoulders, and thick overcoats covering their hides. Winter or summer the same. No fashion seasons for tea kings. Old men standing and drinking their sacred tea. Note how they drink. The can held close to their mouths with two hands.

The sun beat hard on their backs that day.

I stood looking at them for a moment, and I knew you'd have to skin them to get their clothes off. Weird creatures if seen at the fall of night.

Never felt the cold, and never felt the heat. Worked clothes-laden. And there was the first hole struck in the road, and it's a bad sign any time. Heard a man from the town say the very same thing.

Seven black figures stood close around an old steamroller. Still panting, still warm, after its long journey, and smelling like hot steel smells, a cut in your nostrils.

Among those kings, another king.

King of the road, the hill, the barn, the wood, the child. Behind any of those words I have now spoken his true name may be found.

And a wonder to . . . he hadn't been one of the tribe long ago. I shouted into the black heap of them.

'Thought you were bound for near the Holy Well, or behind it?'

A smile from Rhys, and that was all.

And they drank, and drank again, and went on with their holy whisperings.

Any can might have been a bottomless well.

I turned my back on them, and stood looking at the sun low over a hill. Seemed to be hanging there with claws, refusing to go.

I walked into the group of men, and I shared their tea.

Looked at one and another of them.

Queerest human lot you ever saw.

One the exact shape of a washing tub, and another so shapeless you could never work out the pattern on a piece of paper.

One man like a telegraph pole, that's bent by accident.

Another only wanted a big cork that would crown the bottle that he looked like.

The one with a sack and two coats looked like a pregnant maid.

Hang a can on any of their noses, and it wouldn't fall off.

Never a shiver of sweat on any of them that hot evening.

And flat they looked under the height of Rhys.

Seven hard, black lumps, and nothing more than that.

If ever a prophet stood by lesser men, he did that night, and though he might roll under the table at the first pub he came to, would never lose the stature that I saw.

Stood out fine against that evening light.

'He'll not see Holy Well tonight' said one.

'And why not?' I asked.

'Going to read to us when the dark is down, around the fire here, when it's got going.'

I looked at Rhys then. And silver shillings itching in his pocket.

'Thought you were making for the worst part of Flint' I said.

'Like to tie myself to a thing, and then to break it' Rhys said.

The spinney towered over their heads.

Those seven men moved towards a hedge, looked like seven old gnomes, sat them comfortable there, and Rhys among them.

Even the trees wilted, seemed paining for the cool of the night.

I stood there, staring down at them all.

Every move of the frame demanded its reward.

An old man gets up and walks to the spinney, and comes back with a few dry sticks. He starts a fire, that starts another in them all, and though their hard hands have just let go on sacred black cans, there they are itching again. The first spark from the fire and they're at it.

'How about a cup of tea' one will say.

Doesn't even wait for an answer, but goes off and fills the tin kettle. Then around seven they'll be feeling for their sandwiches, and a man of the road can't eat without drinking, too.

Then around the fire as the first bite comes into the air.

And who ever heard of a story round a bright fire on a dead silent road, that didn't have to have the cans swinging again.

Drink, drink, drink. That's the way of it.

'Well, I'll be seeing you sometime, I suppose' I said.

He smiled then, and I left him smiling.

And I walked away for the four miles more I'd have to go.

All the heat of the day was wrapped around me, and I was glad when I came by a stream, and I sat down there, and ran a twig through water, to and fro, and by and by I felt cooler, got up, and went on home.

Knew any number of things could happen to that man.

Those kings around a fire wouldn't like anything from the Book.

But some gay tale of another town, or a sight of a skeleton from someone's cupboard.

Grave that Rhys might be, but they'd laugh it out of him before the light was in.

Tease, and pull a leg till it was six inches longer.
And always I remember them as the laughing men.
Moving from road to road, all the country round.
Heard every tale of Rhys, and every move he made.
And how he caught the man in that big black hut.

* * *

Mervyn Roberts emptied his glass, and Huw filled it.
'Well done, Mervyn' that Vaughan man cried, 'I feel warmer already.'

'Never went near the Holy Well place that night,' Huw Ellis said.

'Went another way, then doubled back, and came up by that well that lies just beyond the Green Gate, and smelt mischief somewhere in the night, though morning it was, near one o'clock, they say.

Found them in the hut together, that Parry man and her, and he was climbing.'

'I'll not stay' said Ifor, quarryman, 'I'll not sit here and listen to wrangling over a dead man.'

'Dead? You know then?' Huw said.

'Dead as the first lamb he ever slew' Ifor said, and walked straight out of The Mill and the Goat, and left the others staring at each other.

The clock struck the hour.

'Yr awr' cried Huw, and one after another they got up, and went out.

Olwen had supper ready when Huw came in.

'Needn't have lit a fire tonight' Huw said, 'that Roberts man broke open his tight mouth and warmed the whole place with a tale.'

'Well fancy that' Olwen said.

Huw was silent.

After a while he said. 'The last words will come out of Pugh Williams's mouth tomorrow. It's the day he has for remembering him.'

'Cilgyn will never seem the same without him,' Olwen said.

'Never' Huw said, and one after another, he blew out the lamps.

A bell was ringing as he walked out of Cilgyn.
 Summoning the choir for practice, something out of Parry.
 And two great daggers of light across Cilgyn's street, one
 from the Chapel door, and the other from Huw Ellis's
 place.
 Walked by Iolo's grandmother's cottage, and no curtain
 drawn.
 A light from the fire, and the Book closed, and an old
 woman listening to the wind.
 Passed three black figures hedge-close, and that was the
 choir moving up to the Chapel.
 Heard the man at the forge battening down, and fortifying
 his big black shed, and knew the snows were on the way.
 And wondered about that missing man.
 And how he lived in that Top Boot place, by the mouth of
 Sir Flook.
 And itched for the summer tale.
 And what might yet come out of a door in that Mrs Parry's
 head.
 The wind behind him and the night as black as pitch.
 Imagined Rhys high and striding, and Rhys prone.
 Thought of the search for seven days that yielded nothing.
 And on the eighth ended.
 And asked himself many questions.

'In another country, or under the bracken?
'Found him a hole in a mountain and stayed there?
'Lying still in the corner he was born in?
'Or in the hole where the gun wasn't fired?'
And dallying still with the idea of something for the
National at Newtown.

The story of Rhys the Wound and the Cloud.
And in a flash was standing on the banks of the Mechain,
and it a summer day.

A golden, naked log rolling down to the water.
And the air heavy with the scent of the first hay.
Some children playing on the bank and watching Rhys as
he swam.

And Arianwen's eye wide behind a fern, and watching
him.

With not a stitch on him, who didn't care.
The bus came along like a tank, and tooting hard.
It woke Goronwy up, and he threw himself into the road,
and waved a hand.

Gave one look through a back window, and those daggers
of light were gone.

And in due time he came to the Top Boot.

And Sir Flook wasn't there.

Went to The Blue Boar, and he wasn't there.

Nor was Mrs Parry.

Then walked back to the Top Boot and waited there.

'Funny' he thought, 'that old scholar said he'd be here
prompt.'

Left the Top Boot and walked off to a place called The
Riding Whip.

And they weren't there, either.

And he sat and he waited in a corner by the door.

This pub was snug down in a snugger road, between Rhos and a place called Bagillt.

Goronwy sat up and stared about him.

And ordered nothing and let the barman glare.

This pub was low, curled round one corner, and if two slum houses ever fall down, will stretch further and swallow an alley, curl again like the pig's tail.

Licensee name of Tym Môr Marw.

Looks quite mad, but isn't.

Called Tym Môr Marw count of his once being a sailor, in a barque with four masts.

Wrecked in a Northern sea, yet saved, and towed home.

And Tym bought her figurehead because he was in love with the woman whose breasts were whiter than the swan.

Black now, and abandoned in Tym's back-yard.

The door closed behind Goronwy, but it wasn't Sir Flook.

And it wasn't that Mrs Parry.

'Duw!'

And when he looked, it was that woman with the tiger stripes.

Knew him at once, and said, 'evenun' mister.'

'Evenin', he said.

'Looking for old Sir Flook?'

'I am.'

'And his long lost love, too, I'm afraid,' and she giggled.

Goronwy moved away from her, once was enough to stare at her dome.

'I'm waiting here for him' Goronwy said.

'Might never come. Nor his little tit-bit.'

And then he got Tym's measure from that tiger-striped one.

Who's known around these parts as 'The Moreby Martyr.'

She spoke.

'Tattooed down to his navel.'

'Gives ale on the slate.'

'And off.'

'Knows a horse like the back of his hand.'

'Likes a sawdusted floor, lots of brass about, and shining high.'

'Any miner is a friend.'

'Shouts and likes shouting.'

'Belays in his sleep – so his wife says.'

'And this Riding Whip is the best ship he ever sailed in.'

'D'you think that Sir Flook would come along here, missus?'

'Might. Might not. I'm no prophet, not like that one you're looking for. Won't find him anyhow. Knew it from the beginning —'

'You'll have a glass?' Goronwy said, only decent thing he could do.

'I'll wait a while' the tiger-striped one said.

And that Tym watching them all the time, and they didn't know it.

Took one look at 'Moreby's Martyr', and roared, and nearly shook his head off.

And a very quick look at Goronwy, new face to this place.

And didn't like his face or his mild.

And said so under a cupped hand to a squinting barman.

'Cop!'

And watched greedily towards a door for the off-shift coming in.

Saw three dead men on a long wooden bench, and knew he'd pitch them out on the stroke of ten.

And a lone man at a little table, building dream-castles with dominoes.

This place blazed with a fire.

And light shone on an old King over the fireplace.
And on two champion jockeys in gilt frames.
And on one splendid, golden beast that won a Grand National.
And on nine wooden faces in a black frame, and that was the Bowling Club.
And one well-rubbed patch on a yellowing wall, where the off-licence ones leaned, and waited for their ale.
'I don't think I like this place at all' thought Goronwy.
And thought he'd hurry back to The Top Boot.
'How long is the man with the cloud of hair been missin' now?'
'Eight days.'
'Write Dead in your book, mister.'
And later he got the Moreby cripple a glass of what she liked.
The clock struck seven. And then eight.
Goronwy wondered what had happened to Sir Flook.
Watched each face coming in, and each one going out.
Stared at Tym behind the counter, and heard the squinting barman humming a tune. Stared at the men on the bench, and the castle builder.
'Spend your sight freely in a new place' that tiger-striped one said.
But Goronwy hadn't a clue.
And then he got up and said he was going.
'Nos da. If they come in here tell them where thy'll find me,' he said.
'Night, mister,' she said, and only sat down comfortably after the Cilgyn man had gone, remembering another date.
The clock struck half past eight.
'Nos da now' Goronwy cried as he made for the door.

But Tym Môr Marw only spat, and never looked his way.
'Back to The Top Boot' thought Goronwy, 'He's bound to be there.'

Back to Tommy Hughes.

* * *

Up one long, black street, and stopped outside the green door.

Then burst in, and was drowned in light.

The Top Boot cried 'Welcome.'

And it still looked like the inside of a ship on fire.

And the noise like the orchestra that was buried in it.

'Hello!' cried Tommy Hughes, 'evenin' to you, sir.'

'Good evening' said Goronwy.

And searched about for well known faces, but the seats were empty.

Then walked up to that counter

'Usual?' asked Tommy, 'I haven't your name, sir?'

'Jones.'

'Common enough. Then yours is a glass of Border?'

'It is.'

'Found your man yet, Mr Jones?'

'No, indeed. The last man searched yesterday, and any other place that Rhys might be sits on the map of another country.

No. We've combed the country clean.'

'Pity.'

'A great pity indeed' said Goronwy.

'Looking for your friend, I suppose?'

'Is he here then? I can't see him.'

Hughes was huge, and laughing, and brutal with health.

'No, he isn't,' Tommy Hughes said, quick and sharp, words like gunshots.

'Said he'd be here around seven o'clock' said Goronwy, 'now look at the time.'

'Well *look* at it then' Tommy said, then hurried down the counter to serve a thirsty miner. Then came back.

'Won't ever be satisfied till you get your bloody claws on that man,' Hughes said, every word coming through his teeth. 'Let him lie in peace.'

'Say that again' cried Goronwy, 'say it again.'

And you could see the colour rising in that policeman's cheeks.

'I *am* saying it' Tommy Hughes said. 'Bugger me Jack! You know it's true. Heard all about it from Huw Ellis. All you want is your bloody notes in a book.'

Goronwy smashed the glass, and the ale flowed.

'Damn you, man!'

'Damn you' said Tommy, 'and the glass will cost you nine-pence.'

'I won't stay here and be insulted' Goronwy shouted.

'Don't. Clear to the devil then,' Hughes said, shoulders heaving under a bull neck.

Then hurried away to serve another miner just come in.

Goronwy looked downwards, scowling at the fragments, heard Hughes talking about the weather, a sick cow, and about six kittens for a cat named Canterbury.

The swing door fairly whistled, and Goronwy Jones was clear.

'Sorry' he exclaimed, and bumped into something in the dark.

'Oh! It's you, sir' he said, for there was a sudden fall of light upon the scholar. 'Good! I wondered when you were coming. Where's Mrs Parry?'

'Not coming' Sir Flook said, 'I'm afraid she won't' be coming.'

'Pity' said Goronwy, and gripped the scholar's arm.

'No. Not in there. Don't go in, sir. Hughes has a mood. Didn't like his look or his tongue. Let's make for Benbow's place then.'

'Just as you wish, Mr Jones. Benbow Evans's place is as good as any.'

They linked arms down a street that looked like a tunnel with two bright eyes at the far end.

'You're shivering, sir.'

'I'm all right,' gruffly from Sir Flook.

And in two minutes they were seated in a snug corner of the Blue Boar.

'I had a bit of a shock,' said Sir Flook.

I'm sorry to hear it, sir. I thought you looked a bit pale.'

'I'll be all right directly' the old man said.

He looked dead straight into Goronwy's eye.

'How much do you want to know?'

'Everything.'

'Well, that's honest enough' said Sir Flook, 'but it's now common knowledge that you're more interested in a dead man than a live one. You'll search no more?'

'No.'

'And only ten days gone' said Sir Flook, 'and knowing as you do that an old tramp's feet are fugitive on him any time.'

'I know *inside* me' said Goronwy.

Sir Flook put a hand on that of Goronwy Jones, looked closely at him.

'You can see inside me, too, Mr Jones. Isn't that right?'

Goronwy nodded.

'And how I live between a black chair and a seat in any of these places.'

'Know that, too.'

'That I suspend from glass to glass, and pay for my hours here by what comes out of my mouth?'

'I know that also' said Goronwy.

'And why I came to these places of an evening time?'

'Nothing is hidden.'

Then Goronwy got up and walked up to Benbow Evans.

'Evening' he said.

'ning' Benbow said, without looking up, then, 'what is it?' quickly.

'A half of shandy and what an old man likes.'

'Understood, sir' Benbow said, and he went away and got what was wanted.

Goronwy walked down the room, and already there was a press of men from an off-shift. Sir Flook had moved, gone away to the furthest corner.

'You like this better, sir?'

'I like it fine.'

'Your health, sir' said Goronwy.

'Iechyd da' the old man replied.

And the rest of a summer tale came out of his mouth.

* * *

'That Parry walked out of a town the next evening, with the force of another man's tongue pressing in his ears, and before his eyes the sight of the bay-bound ship that would break his chains. Walked out to watch for the girl from Llanfair-ym-Mauallt, who at that moment was free of her duty, save for carrying in enough water for the English for that night. Lain on her bed in the attic she was, and only two

thoughts in her head. And spoke them in the silence of her room.'

'All I ever wanted was to belong to somebody.'

'For I'm afraid of belonging to nobody.'

And would think like that, sir, for she was an orphan, and any way out was her best. And wished only to get away from the one they called *The Bear*. So Parry moved through the country, and by and by he came out by that well, and sat him there, and waited. Seven of the clock by his watch. Lay on his back and stared up at the first star. Looked again at his watch, and it said eight. His hope tore him to shreds, he didn't care, and he would wait on. Her voice and her pretty looks were locked in his head, and the remembrance of her smile filled every pocket he had. A fine dust of rain then began to fall. Parry was dressed the same. That tribe's immemorial blue, and a slate-coloured trilby hat that sat on his head as stiff as a board. Sat up in the grass and looked towards the Green Gate, then lay back again. Suddenly he heard the far-off click of a gate, and knew her coming. Later he heard the rattle of the bucket. Lay still and hidden there, and knew he would meet her soon. The heart in him thumped like an engine, for Olwen Hughes was all the bright colours of tomorrow rolled into a blaze. And then he heard her humming lowly as she came his way. And soon through long grass blades he saw her from the tip of her toes to the crown of her head. She knew he would be there.

Up came Parry, with his shock black hair.

'Hellow Olwen' he said, took off his hat and flung it from him.

Slowly he rose to his feet.

'Hello' Olwen said, and stood and looked at him.

Who had more power to her eye since that sight of Rhys the tramp.

Now saw that Parry as a squat miner, a cut-in-half man, and a pressed down man against long black walls. Marked the eyes and the scars beneath. The hands that lacked another's grace and shape. Sensed Parry's mother as being of the same build, and his father, too, and saw him walk the same black road.

Stood off from Parry then, again compared him with another, who at least, she thought, must have had a towering father.

'Let me, please' said Parry, suddenly bold, 'Diolch' he said, and removed the bucket from her hand, went to the well, lowered it down and drew it up, then stood the bucket in the foot long grass.

He came as close to her as ever she had known.

'I love you, Olwen,' the miner said, and Olwen gave a sudden little laugh, for only a night before had another said the same.

'I mean it' Parry said, 'I mean it.'

She watched his restless hands, and knew in an instant, as women do, how close she stood to a fire.

And Parry came even closer, and was wide open, oh very wide, nothing hidden there, and she could see it all.

Then felt the fire-filled hand that squeezed so very hard upon her own. And after it the torrent of words.

He would take her away to a ship and a sea.

Take her away from that dull place.

To a town that stood by the sea.

And listening, she leaned on him.

His other hand came up, then she seemed moving, and saw the eye come full upon her.

Swayed and melted towards him in that long grass.
Thought of that Green Gate house she worked in.
Still knew that any way out was the best. In an uncertain
time. And that night the English would wait for their water.
For the tough miner had the measure of his dream, as he
had the size of the ship to come.

The shape of the house they would live in, close to the
sea.

Saw Olwen's child at a window, in the curve of her shelter-
ing arm.

Who heard his ship blow as she moved out, and waved
to him, and he waved back to them.

Further away through the grass he drew her, far from the
white gate at the back of The Green Gate, and step by step
she followed him.

The words poured, streamed into her car.

Why work for the English lot?

Why be stuck in a great house, behind dark trees, that only
helped to draw a greater darkness down?

Why be a slave in a green place, locked in by mountains and
by hills?

Beyond was the world, that shook, and danced, and dazzled
with the brightness of the life she had never seen.

Let her pile and scatter all the hours she had ever spent
there.

Fling them far. Come away with him, and he would make
her happy, and how her eyes would brighten on the things
she saw.

In it all went through the doors of her pretty head, the
thronging, bursting pile of words.

That weakened, yet raised up, that measured and guided
her every footstep, her eyes blinded by so strong a light that

she did not see the looming doors of a hut. The black and rotting timbers crazily tilting. But he had felt it come, all in this quickening minute, as he had the smell and the feel of the fungoid floor where he had lain and dreamed.

And knew that in all the reeking town there was not a one to match her, who had walked in all her innocence from Llanfair-ym-Muallt, on and on, and down to another valley and to the great house snug in it.

'Where are you taking me?' she asked.

Who really did not care, and did not even hear him when he spoke the words.

'Where our feet may take us' said Parry.

And so they came to the door of the old hut.

Dark and strange to her, who had never before approached it.

But castle, and court, and palace, to him who drew her in.

The darkness was a blanket that pressed them close.

Laid to a floor, who but a week before, did not exist for him in all the living world.

'Olwen! Oh Olwen!' said Parry.

She saw nothing, and heard nothing, and said nothing.

'Olwen!'

Not one hand, but two, were filled with fire.

'You do love me.'

'I love you, Olwen' the miner said.

Who yet seemed filled with fear, and pressed against her.

'You will take me away from here then?'

'I will take you away from here' Parry said, mouthing at her mouth.

So Olwen saw the lights of a town, and a great heaving curve of the bluest water, and the tallest ship she had ever seen, and a house in a little street by the water, and hanging blue curtains on a window so near to the sea.

Gone his hammer hands, and his jockey's stature, gone his bull shoulder, and his boy-like loins. Met all of Parry in his eyes.

'Hold me' she said, who had never had a hold on any man, or on any thing, and only wanted to be held, and to belong. That Parry held hard, and went on holding.

The black hut was full of flowers and songs.

'Fallen away from him all the grey days of a reeking town.

Fallen away the love that bound to hob and hearth, and the grind of duty, as though by God exacted, to swing from cradle to black wall and back again, bow to what was slavish in older bone.

Saw himself move snail-like down his father's tracks, and hated every minute bound.

She felt his fingers move through her spread-out hair.

'I do not even know your Christian name' that Olwen said.

'Olfy'r' said Parry, the only name they gave him at the font.

'Oltyr' she said, 'Olfy'r'.

Spoke it softly in his ear, then fell away with him below a verge of the world. Bound in a fungus-smelling hut, buried in darkness.

* * *

One touch of her fingers on his scarred eyes, and that black country was gone for ever.

'Let me' cried Parry, the fire in her ear.

And she let him.

And even whilst she languoured in the cradle of his hands, yet had the picture of another man, come once to her at the break of morning, and took the water that she gave him, and the bread. And up from below her innocence broke the smile that Parry never saw. And let that miner

move freely in a new country, and anywhere his hands were dipped in flame.

She saw the other clearer when she had closed her eyes.

Tall, and like a prophet, and with hair made for a wind.

Who even at that very moment lay up in a wood, and there, all of a long afternoon, had dreamed of her.

Watched and waited. Who had come again and again to the white gate, then gone away with the water and the bread. And though he never once turned his head, had sensed her long and lingering look. Vowed he would one day take her from The Green Gate, and carry her far beyond the dark Berwyns.

Sat once only by the well that Parry knew, and at Olwen Hughes's feet. And through the woman in her saw his mother, and he was with her, sat in a fuggy, smoky corner on many a winter's night, whilst another roared in a town. Vowed he'd take the pledge and tramp no more, and, will-less, saw it go up in smoke.

The tiny laugh struck bell-like in Parry's ear.

Mouth to her mouth, he asked her for her thoughts.

'One penny for them, Olwen' he said, and she felt his smile imprinted on her flesh.

Who would not sell them.

Whose body seemed moving out to meet another's arms.

And with this other she now sat in a dawn light, in the shelter of pines. And heard the other speak.

Laughed at his promises, and called him Robin Hood.

Saw the house he would build her in a wood.

The dress he'd make her with his own hands.

The food he'd hunt and cook upon a smoky fire.

Whom walls would never hold.

Who yet would marry her, because he loved her.

And she had laughed again.

Counting his years even as he talked, and watched the child walk out from every one.

She let him lean to her, and when he spoke, she smiled again.

Bowed her head gravely, said she would meet him again, and knew she never would.

Nor ever love him, who by his very nature could not give what a Bagillt miner gave.

The Book upon his back filled her with awe.

And once he offered to read a page to her, who shook her head, and said, 'no, some other time.'

Which would not come, and she knew that, too.

Played maid with one man, woman with another.

* * *

That night Rhys came down from the wood. Moved like a fox. Smelt his way by field, and path and stile, moving sure-footed through the darkness. Something down wind. He had it. He was after it. The Book was far behind him, laid under a tree. Moved like a hound, bounding downwards.

Now it was the moment when Parry opened one eye, and slowly raised himself from her warm shoulder, that he saw, that he felt he saw through the slightest crack in the wood, what at first he thought to be a light. And so he tensed, and, cunning as that other, he held his breath, and his ears came up in a flash like those of a hare. No movement would disturb her, floating now in some dreamless sea. Parry tensed. Moved his single eye from crack to crack, and then it lighted on a hole. The eye widened on what he saw. At some distance from where he lay he saw moving towards the hut, a drunken, vivid eye, a brightly lighted eye that

swung to right and left of the hole against which his own was pitted. His muscles flexed, his body tensed to bound. The swinging eye came on, grew as it advanced.

Now across the miner's mind came a host of figures. First he saw the boneless lump they called *The Bear*, crawling and whining factotum in that Green Gate place. Then one of the English lot from there was crossing the path his mind had made. Then thought how it might be some drunken tramp, aiming for the hut that was known to tramps the country round. Parry lay still, his fingers pressing hard to the yielding bed of the floor, his eye motionless on the hole. Yet still the light came on, the drunken eye swung out and down, and then away from him

That Rhys was moving on him and he did not know it. Who might have seen from behind a hundred trees, and waited till the coming of the darkness. Then, at that moment Olwen stirred and opened her eyes. She spoke his name. And in a flash Parry had forgotten the light, and closed his eye on it, and opened it again to two that stared up at him, and he knew them smiling. Nor did he move from his embrace when suddenly in through the door of the hut came the flash of the lantern in the tramp's right hand, held high, so that the light fell sharply downwards. So he stood fast in the doorway and saw it all. Olwen spread to the ground, that miner climbing, and the eye of Rhys was wide on the harbour of their feelings.

* * *

No word was spoken. Rhys stood there, looking down at them. Once the light in his hand shook violently, then his hand came slowly down, and the bright tongue of the light fell clean upon them. He saw the girl and he saw the man.

Her body so white it would have lighted the hut itself, and the half-man covering it. Saw the breasts and a miner's shortened thigh. Stood watching them and said no word. Nor did Parry stir when suddenly the light began to move, slowly from his foot to his head, felt it crawl like some sharp stripping knife, saw a bold flash on Olwen's face in the second that the other's hand had wavered. The light was an eye after all, and it searched them out. Parry pressed to the flesh, the flesh pressed to the mud beneath, and Rhys saw the spread out coat, that kept her body clean. And then he drowned them both, swung the lantern forward, and raised it a bit, and they were haloed in it, his head and her own. The back of the miner's neck hid Olwen's mouth, and once he stared hard at Parry's shoulders, and he may for a second have admired their shape, for they were splendid to see. The fungus smell came up. In one dark corner of the hut Olwen Hughes's head scarf, in another a bundled heap of clothes, and Rhys swung round the lamp, The coloured scarf may well have floated away from the head of the girl, but the miner's clothes were *flung* hard to a blackened wall. The naked bodies lay quite still. Rhys closed his mouth, held his own breath, and listened, and the others seemed scarcely breathing. Now he let the light retreat, back it came, as searching and as skinning as when it had gone up. Rested then in the middle of a boyish back, then lower to, no less boyish buttocks, and there he let it lie, and watched for any movement they would make. Bringing the light back suddenly he let it play about their feet, and he saw her own, locked in those of the miner. The fox was truly home, and this was what he had got the scent of, high up in that pitch-black wood.

Words rushed hot to his tongue, but they never sprang out.

He counted them like stones, as one after another they sank into his throat.

The shy, pretty girl who had walked far from Llanfair-ym-Muallt, and who had taken a job with the English because there was nothing else she could do, nor any girl like her, at that time in the country.

The girl who had smiled at him as she gave him the bread.
And the water.

The one from whose tongue he had lifted many words.

Then given her back her own.

The one he would carry far across the Berwyns.

She whose face was the loveliest thing he'd seen since the day he walked far from a stone house, day after his mother went to the ground.

Who had melted in his eye on a morning of pelting, driving rain.

Who had promised to meet him under a certain tree, hard by his bed of bracken. And she had not come.

Who had struck the vow from him to tramp no more.

To pass a tavern by and turn his head from it.

Had even tried to part him from his Book, and break the strong thongs that held it to his back.

Who had told him how any Chapel would be glad of it.

So beautiful it was, and some pages worked in golden lettering.

Promised she would go with him to the Berwyns.

And drive his wandering feet into another path.

And Rhys spent heavily of his hope, grown out of the first dream he had ever had.

Ached to hold her, yet was shy in this.

And hungered for the laughter out of her mouth that struck upon such shyness.

Who once showed him the tip of her bright breast to
light the man in him.

And let his woman's fingers move about it.

And even then God was lashed close upon his back.

* * *

Now that tall figure stood motionless in a door, and the
light still lay upon them.

Spit fell from a tall man's mouth.

And child, and tramp, and prophet, rushed to his aid, and
held him up, erect.

Then, at that very moment he heard their breathing.
And one hand went to a shoulder thong, and gripped it
hard.

And with the other he hastily drew back the light, for all
their nakedness, and he listened again to the heavy breathing.
And he thought of animals.

Wondered if they'd heave, or turn, and wondered if they'd
grunt.

Then once again he let the light lie upon that Parry's but-
tocks.

And after a moment or two he closed his eyes.

If she should go from him, then there was no other.

He spoke.

'Get up.'

That Parry did not move, and back he drove the light.

For the first time he saw Olwen's arms come up, their look
and slow movement stirred something in him that he could
not understand. Then he was glad, for they would cover her
eyes, which now he knew were open. He saw a quiver of
the other's buttocks, and remembering some lines from the
Book, knew his eye had struck the weakest part of a man,

whose body seemed now to cringe, as though it ached to grow, to melt into the other beneath him.

‘Get up.’

An utter silence. Now they appeared to have stopped breathing.

‘Up,’ cried Rhys, and it was an order that had to be obeyed.

He saw Olwen’s fingers move through her laid-out hair.

The miner’s hands he could not see, as yet engulfed in their own fire.

Then Rhys took one move forward, and bent clean in half to do it, so low the ceiling of that rotting hut, and shot one long arm forward. Caught Parry around the scruff of his neck, and held tightly there, as once his father did to another in a bloody noisy town.

One single movement and he had that Parry on his feet, held erect, and strangely stiffened there, as though by some powerful force of the other’s fingers. And then he dragged him sheer, right out of the hut. Came out flat upon his back, and was dragged off into the darkness by Rhys, just like a leopard will lift a man from the bed he sleeps on in that wild Africa. And now the lamp swung low against his legs.

Olwen raised herself slowly on one knee, and then the other. Rose, and flinging some clothes about her, moved cautiously to the door. Saw men and lamp go rolling downwards, over and over, and over again, and every now and again the sudden break of harsh curses. Over and over again, and down, so that you might think some drunken lighthouse had toppled to the ground. For as they went the drunken light flowed with them. Went rolling down and down.

* * *

And that was a night after the densest, rain and some distance away you could hear the giant, choking sounds of the swollen river that spewed up what it must. And lamp and men rolled in its direction. The lamp cut patterns as it went, cut a cottage to fragments, a standing horse in two. Lit up a wooden bridge, groped up a narrow back lane, showed shadows in a yard below a church.

Olwen still leaned to the door, watching the voyage of the light. And only a sudden shout set motion in her and she ran from the hut. When she came to the corner of a field, the light was still, and for a moment it looked to her like a pool of water under a moon. Then came a second shout. Such a wild shout it stopped her in her track, and might have sent another sound back down a fox's throat. For from time to time, you heard that quite distinctive bark, ice-cold, and half of a dog's.

And could not close her ears to the curses that she heard. She crept close up to the hedge, and bending down, peered through the thinning leaf. Suddenly, inside her, she gave a laugh, and leaping round for the standing lantern, grasped and raised it high, then swung it high like the pendulum of a clock, so that now one face, and then another came swimming to her. And each was blooded. Watched with more curiosity than concern the tall man send the short one to the ground, and all his height was towering then. But not for long, as she was soon to see. The steel in Parry's small and well-made bone was half the man, and now it gathered up and gripped the other, and in a moment a tramp was on his back. Still stood calmly and watched them, a smile upon her face now brighter than the lamp. And only ran in the moment she heard the curse of God from one man, and the Devil from another. Flung the lamp behind her and

ran hard for the Green Gate place. Went silently through that white gate, and round a bend, and through a window left so loosely latched. And climbing to her room heard 'The Bear' snore, and knew his night was full at the village Inn. Climbed to her bed and lay there, and was a queen again, and down in the early morning fields the short and the long of it yet saw no end. I know that Parry, well blooded and sore, walked back to the town before the light was fully down. And Rhys from Cynant walked back to the wood, and laid up there a whole day, and did not stir. Rabbits danced about him, and many a sheep came by. Had he lain too still with that wide-open eye, I think a carrion crow would have come along and had it out.'

Suddenly the old man stopped, leaned back heavily to the wall.

'Are you all right, sir?' asked Goronwy.

Sir Flook made no reply.

Goronwy, who had been sitting tense, his hand gripping the chair on which he sat, staring down between his knees at the floor, now noticed the empty glass that stood too near the old man's foot, and he picked it up, and for a moment held it in his hand

'Are you sure you're all right, sir?' said Goronwy again.

'I think you look rather pale. Let me walk you home.'

'I am all right' replied Sir Flook

But was not, as Goronwy learned another night

An old woman lay under two overcoats.
 As Goronwy heard around seven of the clock, in that same place. From that John Humphrey who told him the tale was ended, and in a few short words. Which much surprised Goronwy.

Still itching for the close of a summer tale, itching for his notes in a book, and dreaming of a crown in New town. 'But is it fair, sir?' asked Goronwy, and looked directly at the other.

'*Nothing's* fair' cried Sir Flook, and struck the table with his fist.

And the noise ceased, and everyone looked his way.

In that Benbow Evans' place.

'Your tale's gone cold, Mr Jones. Around six last evening.'

And then it came in a flood, and everyone was listening.

* * *

An old woman lay under two overcoats.

Name of Parry she was.

Whose husband is in a blue suit in a frame, in her parlour.

And his old miner's lamp gone rusty in a corner.

And the history of the black country written on her bones.

And her sailor son smiling in one photograph, and that

Olwen in another.

And fleet, and golden, and fiery they looked, for they were taken in a happy hour.

That Mrs Parry lay very still there, under one blanket, and two coats.

In a match-box house, caught between two alleys in a reeking town.

Twenty one Wet Street it was.

Who heard no shout as her son drowned, whose neck was once near broken by that Rhys the Cloud.

Whose golden girl whores now in any pub that holds her.

And in a blazing light spells hag to the man that finds her.

Lay quiet in that high old bed, that Mrs. Parry.

And dreaming back to her man's time as the light began to go.

And the feel of his hand in her old hand, that feels it still, in another kingdom.

And no light there at all, and the fire down.

In a hugged, and clutching, and cringing little street.

That might be a street in a dwarf's country, so mean and miserable it is.

And the birds on the wall in the room where she lay. I saw them.

Singing madly away in the fiery bushes they were, on the best wallpaper Central Stores could boast.

Saw her Co-Op Insurance Policy nice and tidy top of the dresser.

And her Old Age pension book top of that again.

And five bottles of coloured water on a table at the other side of that very high bed.

You'd have to have a ladder to climb in.

She might have heard the bus go by for Swch y Rhiw.

Or that Top Boot place where so often Huw would laugh.

And might not.

Neither her head nor her face visible, and might well have been dead.

Save that those overcoats heaved and fell, and heaved again, in a silent room.

And a Parish Magazine lying open on her bed at a page reading, 'Meeting of Mother's Union Tuesday 7 o'clock. Speaker Mr Gomer Ellis.'

And Tuesday might never come, for so I thought at the time.

Her little life snug down there, held close in by the coats.

Green they were, and years old.

Lay there without a sound.

And the light going fast.

And waited for nothing.

I heard a sudden shattering noise on a back-door latch.

The back-door painted green.

No answer to a front door at all, and I went round to the back of that place sucking at my knuckles.

And knocked three times on the door and there was no answer.

The size, and the shape, and the meaning of that house came to me as I found my way into the dark kitchen.

Two rooms up, and two down.

Blue plush furniture in the parlour, and rarely sat on.

Two bedroom floors with lists of nearly twenty-eight degrees.

And one chocolate-coloured door of a bedroom whining as it swung to and fro.

A window opened wide.

Draughts lifting and dropping the brown linoleum on the landing there.

Wind tearing under a shapeless front door.

I called then.

'Are you there, dear?' I called, softly, and wondering if she really was.

'Are you there, Mrs Parry?' I said.

And no answer.

Very quiet it was indeed.

Next door I even heard the thin thread-like chime of an old grandfather clock.

Not a sound in that house of Mrs Parry's.

'Must be upstairs in her front bedroom' I thought.

And set me climbing.

Climbed up between walls that sweated like deck-heads.

And then I called again to that woman.

Knocked on a bedroom door and waited.

Heard nothing save the tick of a clock.

'Mrs Parry' I called then.

And after that a long silence.

Then the sound of my feet heard.

And the cry wrenched from the heart.

'Is that you, Huw?' she called.

And for the first time heard what might have been a fairy breath.

I stood quite still there, and I didn't answer at once.

'The coal and the shavin's are in the cupboard under the stairs, Huw.'

She was talking then, her muffled voice sounded strange under the coats.

I listened.

'I fell down and I couldn't move' she said.

'My head full of a bright light, and I was dizzy in a moment, and down I went. Are you all right, Huw?'

The overcoats rising and falling and then I knew they were hiding fever.

'The socks are on the oven door, dear, the shirt's ironed and hanging on the line. I didn't want you to miss the Tontine night, Huw.'

And again the thing I now dreaded, the question.

'Is that you, Huw?'

So then I spoke.

'I'm here, dear' I said, 'it's all right. Did you have a nasty fall then?'

'Huw! Oh Huw!' that Mrs Parry said.

Her muffled voice cried, 'I'm glad you're back.'

An arm striving madly under the blanket.

'Dreamin' I was' she said.

'Hush!' I said, 'hush now, dear. Try to be quiet.'

And I tip-toed to my friend's bed, and I sat me down.

'Dreamin' I was' she said. 'It was like that evening in the Christmas time, Huw —'

'Yes dear' I said, 'I know it was. But it's all right now.

I'm here. I'll find my things. Don't worry now.'

'You wouldn't remember that, Huw. The world was empty five nights, and I thought you'd gone, and then you hadn't. I thanked Christ that night, I did indeed.'

'Ssh!' I whispered down to her, my hand now light upon the coats. 'Don't excite yourself, Mrs Parry —'

And then I remembered quickly, and I cried at her, 'dear'.

I was staring at one hazy leg of a chair, and then at nothing.

And in the darkness I counted every breath.

Then I got up and began to search for matches.

I stumbled about. I knocked against things.

In the end found a match in my own pocket, and struck it, and the light shone so brightly that room was yawning at

me. Then I found a candle and lit it. Stood it in a vase, and put it high on the mantelpiece.

In a moment the room was full of the queerest shapes.

'Are you feeling all right now, dear?' I asked, and knew she wasn't.

'You had a nasty shock, I expect.'

'There now' I said.

The chair creaked maddently as I sat down.

Lay my fingers very gently at the corner of her pillow.

By stealth I found her hair.

Later the hot forehead, then traced my way to her coldish lips.

I lay my fingers to them for a moment, and I listened to her breathing.

Sir Flook paused, then looked towards the licensee, that Slit-eye, that Benbow Evans.

'At Tommy Hughes's place they used to call her my tit-bit, and a cruel libel it was.'

Then he half turned and looked at Goronwy, and spoke again.

Coals crashed from the grate.

* * *

'I spoke to her softly.'

'The Moreby Martyr told me about you, dear' I said, 'met her traipsing in my direction. I came on here, sharp.'

'I got up then, and I brought over the candle, and held it high over her bed, then very low indeed. I stared at what I saw.

I drew down the blankets and the overcoats.

Her mouth was open, but only breath came out.

And the eyes tight shut in the hammered face.

'There now, dear' I said, 'you're not alone. Remember that.'

I stroked her hair.

'You'll not go out alone from this cold shelf of the world' I said.

'And I meant it' cried Sir Flook, 'I meant it.'

'I'm sure you did, sir' replied Goronwy.

That bar-room silent, and every face his way.

'I thought quickly then of those who should come.

That Gomer Ellis quickly from the Mission House.

One nurse of that Victoria's lot.

One ambulance to follow from its stable.

One doctor just to cry "The End" !'

Sir Flook paused again.

The white head had sunk low upon the breast, the hands lay quiet in a lap.

'She told a good tale in her time, and many a time laughed. God! I've always loved a man who laughed.

Never heard her cry but twice, once after the fall of roof when Huw took it standing below Llay.

One other time over another in a far Indian ocean.'

He flung his hands into the air, and all those eyes were watching him.

'Duw! I saw that room, and never again will I say that mine is dark, nor any hour in it, for that place she lay in was at the edge of the world. Never again, and that I swear.

I felt for her hand, and held it, and said softly in her ear, "It's Huw."

I was silent then, and I knew I could not move.

"Can't leave her" I thought, and yet I knew that I must, the moment the others came.'

Sir Flook held his breath.

'You're tired, sir' said Goronwy, 'enough. Enough. It's been a shock.'

Sir Flook seemed not to hear.

'The best thing The Moreby Martyr ever did for me' he said, 'was to tell me by a corner of The Blue Boar that an old woman was on her way out.'

* * *

A pin would drop in that Bar-room, and it would be heard. Even that Benbow Evans held tightly by the old man's words, his long back hard to a wall, and his gaze rapt.

And thoughts as slow as funerals moving in his head.
Counting the nights that woman came and sat, and her Huw beside her.

Remembering the night when first he saw her.

And the one when Huw Parry never came.

The night that she and that Sir Flook met up for the first time.

And how their friendship grew.

And something more than that in later days, and neither of them spoke it.

And he could name the women that had laughed at that Sir Flook.

His elf-like figure and his rounded shoulders.

The pigeon breast that killed the women that he dreamed of.

Until that Parry woman had fancied something softer there.
Loved her silently for many a year, and never breathed a word.

And crawled from pub to pub, because she came.

Who once had dreamed of two at Penybont-ar-Ogwv.

Then heard from her own lips one evening time, that she
was bound to Huw till Resurrection day.
And that the coldest evening he had ever known.
So the thoughts crowded into 'Slit-eye's' mind.
Then sank as suddenly as boulders in a sea.

* * *

Wind came under the door, and under the grate, and the
flames roared.

Shadows climbed like furies up an opposite wall.

As Benbow looked around.

Saw strange groups of men now grown to corners

Tired bones on one bench and another, wallowing at their
ease.

Still leaned to a wall, still watched that old Sir Flook.

'Been a good customer here in his time' he thought.

'And so was she that treads another road.'

Looked up at a clock that drove the minutes round.

Looked down on countless backs.

And then Sir Flook was speaking again.

'I came away then, and the wind behind me down that
alley, moaning up to my shoulder —'

Misery Fawr from Pig y Boni broke the spell.

'What did the wind say, John Humphrey?'

'An old woman has gone home.'

And Misery Fawr lurched out from his corner, came to the
counter, then banged his glass hard down.

'Life must go on, Benbow' he shouted, 'the same again.'

The spell broken, and The Blue Boar rocking to the leap
of tongues.

And it forgot Sir Flook, and it forgot a Cilgyn man.

'Let me take you home, sir' said Goronwy. 'Come now.'

He raised the scholar up, and put an arm about him.
And a straggler from an off-shift swung the door.
'Diolch.'

Then held it wide for them as they went out, the darkness
drowning them.

All the way linked arms, and rarely spoke. And before
eleven of the clock had come to that dark villa by a bridge,
that Mrs Parry called by another name.

'Go away now, Mr Jones' Sir Flook said, 'go away now.'

'Nos da then.'

'Nos da.'

And he went. and this time just managed to catch the last
bus for Swch y Rhiw.

The only passenger in it, and the driver singing at the top
of his voice, as he swung fast round one corner, and then
another.

Verbatim report on a stream of abuse from that Mrs B. Prothero, late of Llangar.

* * *

That Davies lodging at the Llys who drives the green bus for Swch y Rhiw was tooting now, waiting for me on the corner, but I wasn't going, and don't think I'll ever see that town again, neither will that old scholar who lives in the dark house some miles beyond it. Neither will Mrs Parry. And I seem to have got all I can ever get about this man who let his hair grow. So now I am back on what you call schedule. Looking through my black ledger I saw that I had slipped up on some things, so tomorrow sharp I'll get moving on them. Shut the notebooks up, too. Something about that tramp may have to come out of my own head, after all. But I've set my mind on a certain thing and I'm sticking to it.

Five o'clock now and it's strange that Mrs Prothero, who does for me, hasn't been around to get me my tea and do various odd jobs, and no other woman could do them, and that's a fact.

Middle-aged she is, rheumy in both legs now, and is 'letting herself go' which is a phrase other women are fond of using about her. And the one thing that really worries me is that

I forgot to write that Inspector Hughes about that rise in her wages, not much, but being greatly needed, Mrs Prothero has been after me about it, and I must get down to it. Quarter past five now, and it's odd she hasn't come, because she's usually so very prompt, and can't do enough for a Cilgyn policeman, and that is saying something.

I just sat in my little sitting-room, same size as one of those Lilliputian ones built by old Trevor, who is a damned fox if ever there was one. Still —

I got up and went and looked out of the window. I'm not used to making my own high tea, which is my chief meal of the day, and I'm not used to having to look around for odd things that get mislaid, and she aims to have everything nice and tidy and handy. Many good points in that woman, and I feel just slightly guilty that I forgot about this raise in her wages.

Here she is now. Gone round by the back. She'll appear in fifteen minutes and say my tea's ready, and I shall be glad of it. I must confess, too, that I'm glad these journeys are over, I find them tiring, so different to the way you live in a place like Cilgyn.

Mrs Prothero never came near me until a quarter to six, and I was annoyed about it.

Stood at the door and looked in and said nothing for a while. I had a feeling something wasn't quite right, and if it's this rise in her wages that is greatly on her mind, well I can understand it, as she applied four months ago for it, and I'm afraid it's been forgotten.

'D'you want rice-pudding for your tea tonight?'

Spoke at last. The words were as sharp as razor blades.

Couldn't help staring at her. Never called me Mr, never called me Jones, and never would call me Goronwy.

'Has the green bus broken down then?'

I hardly had time to reply when she was at it again.

'Didn't break down the night Inspector Hughes came from Llangar, and you weren't here, which he said was strange in a policeman who though he has certain hours of duty and must be on his feet for the full time, yet has moral ones that go on and on long after a clock's stopped. Told him about my wages not being raised yet for looking after a fool like you, and was promised me months ago, and he said everything's gone to hell in Cilgyn since an old tramp got missing and lifting everybody off their feet with it. I said you said to ask about my wages rise direct, it's not much anyhow, not for the work I do for you, and he said, God Almighty, hasn't even that small matter of a simple policeman's house-keeper's wages been settled yet? It's over three months old. Said he only hoped a thing like that didn't have to go into committee whatever he meant by that. D'you want rice pudding with your tea or not?'

Like lava out of her mouth.

'Said what were you like with your boots off, that Inspector Hughes from Llangar I mean, odd to me at first, till it come on me sudden and I knew he meant when you were out of your blue. Said something about the green bus to Swch y Rhiw carrying an extra passenger these last evenings, and said he wouldn't ever be seen dead in the town it stopped at. Asked me what time you got home some evenings, and I said I didn't know, and how could I. Respectable people in Cilgyn are in bed and safe and sound long before twelve o'clock which of course is early in a drunken town like the one you went to those times. You never said if you wanted your rice pudding with your tea, d'you want it or not, you know you like it, only got to say yes or no —'

Coming out of her mouth so fast I can't even get a word in, and never knew she had such a long tongue.

'Well d'you want it or not? Strange you haven't said so, usually —'

It was indeed, and difficult it would have been to have said anything at all, all her angry batteries charged, and full on me, and full *at* me, and I knew what was coming. This delay about the rise in her wages, which actually is only another bob by the regulations, and carries this tiny matter around on her shoulders for all Cilgyn to see like it was a wound. And each time I tried to open my mouth to tell her YES I did want the damned pudding with my tea, and she knows well I always have it, well it shut tight again by reason of this continuous blast of hot air out of a middle-aged woman's mouth, and a boiling mouth it is, and that's the only word for it, boiling.

Very curious indeed about my nights away on a green bus. Very curious.

She said did I know that that Olwen Hughes was still hanging about places in what is still a reeking town, spite of the Welfare State. I almost said 'well no, I don't', then it came back to me sharp what that old scholar had one night said to me in The Top Boot, said how one night he'd take me to a place and show me something that would fairly widen my eye.

At it again. Still lava, still boiling.

'Didn't know you were barding it again' she said.

And in a lucky little hollow between two falling cataracts I managed to get in a word or two.

'Barding it?'

'I could never close my eye rightly on what lies open in a book, and if you're in such a bloody hurry to get off every

evening on that bus, who pays the fares, the taxpayer of course, then you're bound to have your mind full on one thing and not another, and the book left open here, and I read some of it, and really I never saw such nonsense in all my life, and I'm no half-wit, though I know you think I am, and have done for a long time now —'

I blasted.

'Yes I'll have pudding, and can I have my tea, Mrs Prothero, PLEASE?'

'My ears aren't sewed up to my head like that Mervyn Roberts man, and my mouth's a good clean mouth, and never was anything else, and the things I read — the things I've heard lately — only made me want to rush off and wash it out —'

'Have you seen my slippers anywhere, Mrs Prothero?' I asked.

'And I'm not the only one in Cilgyn that could have told you all you wanted to know, what you picked up for good money, and saved you and the taxpayer a bit of money, wasted on those bus fares night after night. Besides what you've been pulling out of your pocket account of an old codger like that John Humphrey whom everybody in this country knows is only the halt shadow of half a man, who only wants two straight drinks to loosen his old tongue and turn him into a thousand and one nights, and would go on and on and on, and break the patience of any clock with his tales of this and that and the other, and what he picks up around those places. And that Mrs Parry the same, who thinks her husband Huw Parry was the only man in the country that ever shot down a pit cage, and it only makes you out for a fool Mr Jones, and more than that. And I've asked you three times now if you want this pudding with

your tea which I cooked special, though I don't know why I ever bothered really, you never here half the time, and if you carried on like that in the police any other place they'd have the trousers off you before you could say knife. If you don't want it you can have it cold tomorrow, and I hope that this Friday I'll be paid all the back shillings the law owes me for looking after a lot like you. I don't want to hold you up another minute, I know you're only waiting to hear the toot on the horn from that Davies man who lodges here, and will always be a stranger here, too, expecting to see you run down to the corner there. And I suppose he goes home to his lodging and has a good laugh about a policeman who only got clear of his respectable little villa by accident, and nobody in Cilgyn thinks you're any thing like that Oswald Harris who used to be the policeman here, best we ever had, and came from somewhere better than a place called Bagillt —'

I could only stare.

And she stared back, and I could almost see the words piled on her tongue, sharp as little tacks they were, never saw such an unusually quiet woman get into such a state over a little matter of a shilling a week rise in her wages.

'It's all the talk of an evening in Huw Ellis's place. That Ifor from the quarry said it was a poor enough bard that had to kill a man before he could get a tale out of him. That all you thought of was your bloody crown at Newtown, *if* you ever get it, man. Said you might have spent your evenings better searching about the mountain for Rhys the Cloud, searching till you dropped like some of these children have been doing, that Idris all around the mountain and whistling into every hole he sees, because the child thinks that man will hear his strange whistle, and even Pugh

William has never stopped looking about and many another, which is more than you did who was only interested in his bones, it's never even occurred to you that some men have had a drunken bout that lasted a whole week and it's only two days over that now. Even Richards Forge was saying how about one really good last search all around the place and then everybody can come out of it with clear consciences, for you're not the only one interested in an old tramp, mister.'

Went on, and then on again.

'Mervyn Roberts came down from his holding last night and banging away on your door, everybody heard him, and you *would* be sitting on your backside in one of those places in a town, and he was real mad when you were out, and actually swore and cursed you for it, rare enough with him, but he *had* lost a prize ram, enough to make anybody swear when the law's arm can't be seen anywhere about. And had to go and notify the loss somewhere else —'

'Mervyn Roberts lost a ram?'

'Can I have my REA?'

'And he was just as good at cursing as he was at praying, who doesn't know it, and you've only to use your big feet a little more and get around these parts with a sharper eye and take a walk over to say that *Half Moon* place where he was only two months ago, and because he wasn't served with a drink of ale put a curse on the place and the man with the red waistcoat and the brass buttons on it, and his wife, and everybody who was sitting there, and three days after that the place went on fire and then two dogs they liked very much were burned to death, and it's no use trying to make a saint out of an old tramp. None at all —'

'Mrs Prothero, PLEASE?'

'As for the man in him. Well I ask you: And what's the use of only half breaking a man's neck if you don't like him as much as he didn't like tich from the Saturday town, and a tich of a man he was indeed. Though he was man enough to put a bit of fire into a girl that knew he loved her, and she loved him the same, and made no mistake about it. And didn't stop even five seconds to hear the other lot cry like some fool child just because that Parry did it on him good and proper and ran her away with him to Swansca Bay and did everything he said he'd do into the bargain and made her happy for a time, though everybody knows she was a born whore and even that's the least part of a weird and roving life, just like that tramp in a way, save she didn't go about with a blaze of hair on her head and looking like the biggest Welsh fool. And everybody saying he did it and let it grow like that as a reminder of what that Olwen Hughes did to him, dropped him flat, for a black miner out of Llay place, and who, if he had been half a man would have had her on his back, too, and taken her away to this place behind the Berwyns somewhere where he was going to set her up as wife and mother and even promised around that time that he'd start and do an honest day's work —'

'What did Inspector Hughes finally say about your wages?'

'Even that Will Evans Shop said you were never much of a bard, anyhow, and everybody knows you're aiming to send in something for next year's National, said you were so conceited about it all that was why you left your books lying open in this very room after you'd trotted off to your pub crawling after old bones, open on this desk knowing that I'd see them there, knowing that what comes easy and surprising to some, doesn't to others, and Evans knew all

about your secret ambitions from the day that the man carrying his wound went missing, and you were determined to make him the subject of your play or something. Evans talked about secret dreams of glory in a bony old bard who dreamed nightly about a Newtown Eisteddfod while an old tramp was lying about somewhere, and maybe dead. And everybody in Cilgyn hopes you not only come out at the bottom of the whole list of candidates, but fall down on your back from the shock of seeing your old nasty bit of vanity turned upside down for you —'

'If the rice is ready, will you please heat it up, Mrs Prothero?'

This lava was choking my sitting room and it was like a fog in the place, and I had had just enough of it by this time I can tell you. I got to my feet and I shouted to her that I had had enough of it, and I even questioned her right to go on and on at me like this, just because the matter of her wages had been overlooked. But even though I glared daggers at her, it didn't have the slightest effect on her tongue, and I can only think she's been saving it all up for a long time now, because once or twice I had sort of fallen in love with her, and she wanted to marry me, and suddenly I knew I was wrong, her being years older and I wasn't having it, and ever after that time she watched me like a ferret for a chance to use her teeth on me, and even on what's decent in me at that.

'*I am ready* for my TEA, Mrs Prothero,' and ice in every word I spoke. I really had had enough of it.

'And saying in your book how this tramp is the king of Cilgyn. Heard some nonsense in my time, but not as bad as that. *King* — of *Cilgyn*. What next indeed. You are mad, Goronwy Jones, and I thought you were that time

you said you'd fallen in love with me, and proposed back of the Chapel there, and only then because you wanted the ten acres my Uncle Gwilym left me. You had vanity even then, and it was much bigger than your feet those days, though I'll admit you were nice looking, in a sort of way, and even well set up in a manner of speaking. But I would have been a fool to have done it, for to have a husband go raving made about a missing old tramp to such an extent that he sneaks off every night out of the very place he's meant by the law to guard —'

'Off duty' I shouted, 'off duty I was.'

Real angry I was with that Prothero one. Just went *on* and on, never a sign of stopping, like some kind of poison got into her bone of a sudden.

'Llangar man said a policeman is never really off duty.' 'And now' I said, with as much control as I could muster, 'and now, have you quite finished your little harangue, Mrs Prothero,' and I never said a sillier thing, for out came another stream of lava, another catalogue of things I hadn't done, and I suddenly realised she must have been reading my Duty Ledger as well when I wasn't there.

(1) Should have made out a summons against Tym Watkins account of fishing licence that he was using a year out of date.

(2) Should have hung up an order in the Post Office five days ago, and I hadn't done that either.

(3) Hadn't collected two Old Ages from the Post Office for two women who are so old they'll never rise out of arm-chairs, and said both were getting goods on tick from Will Evans till next Friday count of me forgetting.

And out it came again.

'You weren't here to do the things because you were flat on your back having slept in and I'm not surprised considering

it was after three one morning when you got back here, and nobody will ever ask you what you were doing in an old codger's dark house around that hour of a clock. And I never said a word about it to that Llangar lot when he called here and you were out, though I'd nearly a mind to, I was so mad with you neglecting my back wages —'

'Out of my way, Mrs Prothero' I shouted, my control collapsed then.

'And *anytime*, people think you're more of an old woman than a policeman always stood outside your house cleaning your windows, night and day in your shirt sleeves as if you had nothing better to do, and you never once thought of asking me how much soap I was using up out of my own pocket account of all your washing, and once I felt like saying to your face that you wished far too much for a decent man. Anyhow I am quite determined on one thing —'

'Out woman' I shouted, 'Out I say.'

It sounds dramatic, I know, but what else could I do? Anyhow she went, and never was I more glad to see the back of anybody. And when I was at last able to get into my own kitchen the tea wasn't even made, and the fire dead out, and I was real mad and ran to the back door and though she was gone and almost out of sight I did manage to let out two curses, and I have a feeling that at least one of them landed on her back. And I shouted after her, 'send your back wages by post, don't ever come here again. I've finished with you Mrs Prothero, for good.'

And I had.

And I sent her her few miserable shillings, and I've never seen her since.

And a good thing too.

Third report of Goronwy Jones, Policeman and retired bard, Station-House, Cilgyn. (Written in my own time.)

* * *

Many things are gone.

Three of the loveliest months in a Cilgyn year. And one sad one.

Rhys the Wound gone, too, and very far gone indeed.

And the sign you knew him by is gone from The Mill and the Goat.

An uncle lifted clean out of Arianwen's head, and another one put there by her mother.

And the Mean ones let it be known that that old tramp was an amusing old devil

And told the English lady her worrying days were over, for her barns would be much cleaner now, and clear of the threat of fire, since hand and candle would never be seen there again.

And her daughter said she always knew that Rhys was two kinds of a man, and that is true enough.

For drunk, that Rhys could knock a Welshman down.

And raise and light him up, when he was sober.

By a song out of his mouth, or a story by the Book.

Gone too, that visiting bard from Barry, his old sister being

much better now, but not before he had written a song of six verses for the children, and called it, A SONG THE WIND SANG, and Rhys's name in the first line of each verse.

Like, 'Have you seen a man named Rhys with hair like smoke —'

These hills are wise, and any shape or shadow would be seen, and any footfall heard, and any voice at all that cried him Found.

He *was* insured for tuppence a week in that Prudential lot, but Will Evans says it'll be a miracle indeed if they ever pay anything out.

And wherever I walked this day I saw the thing that I hated most.

In every hole and corner of this place, Hope liès flat on its back.

Like one tree after another, down by the axe.

And soon the snows to cover all of it.

That Richards lit his forge fire and nearly smoked Cilgyn out. Moulded a cross of iron, and struck it hard to the ground, just below that great space above Penllwyn, where once rock lay, the last place he had seen that Rhys the Cloud.

I was in the Chapel too, and there the best and the worst that was Rhys came out of Porth William's mouth.

And I knew it was End in the Hour that he spoke it.

And I made up my mind, *finally*, that it will be ten poems with the harp and I'll send it to next year's National.

Not a sound from that old Sir Flook at Penybont-ar-Ogww, flat on his back since the night an old woman went home, and never been seen in any place since that hour, when a summer tale was broken in two pieces.

Anchored down there, the queerest place I ever walked into. The best part of a tale lying under his pillow.

And the other part folded and silent now, under an old windblown ash, in an older yard, and not one half mile's walk from her little gnomie house.

Her funeral was very nice, and that Sir Flook was too ill to go.

Which reminds me I had a visitor late last night, that Gomer Ellis who gave her God's assurance at the very last minute, but more about what he brought me, later.

Wreath from him and Sir Flook. And one from me.

One from Tommy Hughes and one from old Slit-Eye at The Blue Boar.

And the blinds down in the Top Boot place and the Blue Boar from three to five, which is decent in a brewer's lot.

And one from 'Five friends of Huw' down at that Llay place. Even one from the Moreby Martyr, which shows she remembered in good time that her scais weren't the only ones in the world.

The one who cleans for me got her back wages and her rise and I told her she could now go to the devil, and I think she has, for she took the first train to Brymbo or somewhere around that part.

Had a row with Hughes from Llangar who came over and wanted to know about everything I'd been doing, which I reckon is private when you're off duty.

Bile on his tongue ever since the day I threw him at a wrestling match for charity in another place that shall be nameless.

About that Gomer Ellis who called on me last night.

Now there's something elemental on two legs if ever there was.

And a curious sort of light in his half shut eyes, the sort of light I've seen just before a snow comes down on you.

A very respectable man indeed, not quiet though, carries fire in every pocket, and a real crusader.

Runs a Mission House that carries the biggest doors I have ever seen. Dead black they are. And inside, the cavernous place it is, the lights on, day and night. Even the tiniest sin couldn't ever hide anywhere. And always an ocean of sound, always somebody being saved, on the point of being saved, and people crying out, and lots of singing, and if you go in there you're struck at once by this tremendous feeling of being alive, very much alive, at the brink of another kingdom.

Something quiet about Gomer as I said, but something grand and mad and whirling about him, too. Lift you off your feet in the street and carry you in and fling you into a real deluge of faith and hope. Easily the finest of God's runners in that town. Even his knock on my little blue door was like an explosion, an ultimatum, an alarm, a tocsin. I only looked at him the once and saw how this man would always be at war with time, smashing it down, making great roads through it, challenging it to beat him, ever running against it, and always blasting it. A poor creature indeed that couldn't be saved by him.

'Evening, Mr Jones' he said, quick, electric, as though he'd seen my clock was twenty minutes slow. Walked right in to my sitting-room, sat down, threw wide his big blue rain-coat, tossed a brown paper parcel on to my sofa, didn't waste a minute, or an nth part of a second. Came to it.

'Some people came to shift furniture from that Mrs Parry's place, dealers, pays some thing off what she owed, I was there just when they were shifting her old dresser and as it came away from the wall I heard a soft thud and a swish and I was on it right away. Can't trust those dealer's

men. Extraordinary people. Seem to know very quickly how poor a person is, how rich, turned Mrs Parry inside out in three seconds. I decided what was behind a dresser might be a much hidden parcel left by an oddity, might contain a few old pound notes lost down the bottom of a tightly rolled up sock, might contain a tin box with gold in it. Saw their eyes as they shifted it out. I grabbed it. No money. Would have disappointed them indeed, only a bundle of old letters, some photos of a miner of the old Queen's day, God rest her soul, she was a wonderful woman in her way. Also an old school book which must have belonged to her son and things written in it by him, read some of it. Closed the book. Knew you were gathering together old bones and hoping to put some life into them, and here they are. Don't want them. Haven't the slightest interest in them. Take them. *Keep* them.' The colour in his voice, the shout, the clangs, the bells, the flames. Why I could have sat there listening to Gomer Ellis the whole of a night. Bent low then and stared hard at me, and a *far* different expression on his lion-like, upthrusting face, in those half closed eyes of his. And I noticed the fangs slightly drawn back then, and I was sure there was no kind of blessing or any softness rolling up his throat. Even clutched my shoulder, so then I tensed and wondered what was going to spark out.

Then quickly through his teeth again.

'And I know all about *you*, who for many a year did more than your solid best in the line of *Art*,' snarled the word at me, 'and it always turned out to be worse than your worst, if you follow me, and I know you're letting it be known everywhere that you're going to write a three act drama about the man with the great mass of hair, which I always thought *senseless* —' and *threw* the word out of his mouth,

'and I only want to let you know that a great friend of mine, a *very* great friend of mine who lives in London Street, back of Caernarvon, a man who wouldn't even dare to be seen in a policeman's boots, this friend I tell you is also sending in something for the National, and as he's *bound* to take the crown, and has the kind of head to take it clean, I'm warning you, Goronwy Jones of Cilgyn that you are wasting your time, and what bardic bones you have left you should respect, so let them lie in peace under you. Good *night*.'

Gone? I should think so. Quicker than a flash, and heard his feet like nails tearing down the road that leads to the tiniest railway station on the whole earth, and that's at Cilgen, and even half a minute after he had taken his violent body out of it, my front door was throbbing from the energy he flung into it.

So now I know he doesn't like me very much, but that is on account of the fact that my mother and I have always been Baptists and will not go to his Methodist Mission House.

Then suddenly I was feeling this thing in my hand, and there was the book belonging to that Parry the miner, and I opened it and had a look inside, and it was divided into three sections and I read the top of each one.

WHAT MAM WANTS ME TO DO.

WHAT DAD THINKS I WILL DO.

WHAT I WILL DO MYSELF.

And after my supper I let the lamp burn all the night away.

It was all or nothing with that Parry, and he had both. I read the book.

'My name is Olfyr Parry and I am thirteen years and ten months and two days old. And every morning, winter or summer the same, my father comes up a ladder from his work, and that Melvyn Roberts told me yesterday that this ladder is two thousand feet long and starts at the bottom of the earth and comes out at the top.

And when the men are coming up from the dark their feet made a noise like thunder there.'

I shut the book.

And thousands and thousands of sparks would fly upwards from the great nails in their boots, and sometimes it is dangerous in that place.

'Then it's eight o'clock, and he comes in all black through the door. In five minutes he's ready and I am, and Mam gives us breakfast. She sits by a hob and a fire and watches everything steam and boil and hands it across to us by stretching her arm and we take it and eat it.

My dad looks at me. Always the same look, watching and saying nothing.'

Counting the days in his head, I expect, and ticking each day off on a calendar on the dresser until his son leaves school and is down with him. His hook on a boy's neck is

like the little hook that the trout won't see until it's too late and up comes the fish.

'And one morning you'll have your dad's trousers on, and he'll be proud, and so will I, you'll be a man then, Olfyr. and the first day you will see how large the world is. And down this long ladder on wheels will be other men and their sons will be with them.'

'I don't want a mine, Mam.'

She slapped my face then.'

He didn't want a mine. I opened the book again, I read what's sacred out of a boy's head. And I came to a page where he said, 'I will go to the sea.'

Now he would run to the school, how many miles to that school?

He will speak to that John Humphrey I can hear him now.

'How big is a ship, Mr Humphrey, sir?'

'There's a ship you can put in your pocket out of a toy shop window, and there's one so big that they tell me a whole train will go down the funnel.'

'Duw! How high is a mast, Mr Humphrey, sir?'

'Thirty feet, fifty, ninety, all sizes of mast, Olfyr Parry.

Do you want to be a sailor, then?'

'Yes sir.'

'Why then?'

'I saw a sea at that Old Colwyn place once when I went there with dad. And many ships sailing along. I liked the sea then, Mr Humphrey, sir.'

'Fancy that now.'

'How big is a sea, Mr Humphrey?'

'There's a sea bigger than Wales, and one bigger than

Africa they say, but there's a sea that's only as big as your own hand, Olfyr Parry. It's the way you look at it.'

'Yes sir.'

The way he looked at it. I shut his book again, I thought about that, and how the dream first broke on him, like a light shining on you.

There is an old park by Coedpoeth, and everywhere railings of iron and very black ones they are, to keep that grass inside, I suppose. And on the South side hard by those railings a path, and if you span this path there is one of those places that old Sir Flook liked so much, and there is a boy running a stick by those railings, and all around old men sitting on benches and talking to each other down their throats, and spitting all over the place. And one growls at that Olfyr to shut his noise, so the boy climbs the railings, falls to a path on the other side, and a big tear in his pants for his trouble. Then out of a door in the bright place a man, a rolling man with a blue jersey at his neck, and all the way down to his waist blue, and Olfyr watches him stride along like those men do, just enough room to port, just enough room to starboard.

Will a sailor give a boy a penny?

A great arm around a tiny neck and a loudish laugh out of that man and a lot of pennies for Olfyr and he stares up at this man.

'Are you a sailor, sir?'

'Sir. I love that' the sailor says. 'I am indeed. Would you like to come along to a fine ship, son?'

A call from Mrs Parry's doll's mouth, and he turns, and his mother is white all over from her apron, and the sails fly as the arms come up.

'Olfyr! Yma! Olfyr! Olfyr.'

He runs. The sailor goes where he will go.

'I've told you about talking to strange men, haven't I?' and a cuff for him.

'He's a sailor, Mam.'

'Is he indeed, and you're a miner's son, come along, now and drags him home.

I read another page.

'Mam says she doesn't like the sea. And I asked dad and he said he hates it.'

And each hate would strike the same spark in Olfyr Parry.

Another page.

'This morning I am fourteen, and tomorrow I am going to that Llay place with dad.'

And when he reached the bottom the sea had dried up.

'I came home from work today with Dad, and I laughed when I saw my face in a mirror so black it was, and dad laughed, and Mam, too. I went to Sunday school. Mr Humphreys taught, and when I was going home he caught my arm, and he looked close at me and said something, and I was pleased because it shows he knows, and I ran home and I told them.

'Man?'

'Well.'

'D'you know what that Mr Humphreys said to me this afternoon?'

'Then what?'

'He said, "Olfyr Parry come here" and he pulled me close and stared at me.'

'Then what?'

'He said, "I can see the sea standing in your eye, Olfyr Parry".'

'What a stupid man for a clever teacher,' Mam said. I forgot what he said then, and the next day I went to the mine again.'

So down in that Mrs Parry's 'deepest part of the world' he must have remembered what Sir Flook said to him, and who knows, in that dark country he might have heard the breaking of waves.

I turned many pages.

'WHAT MAM WANTS.'

Sits every morning to that fire and every night. Queen of the Hob she is.

Watches me. Watches my eye. She doesn't trust that Mr Humphreys.

Wants me down in a mine on all my days, with dad.

And in the evening time when I am on day shift to sit with her to a hob, and listen to all her words and they flow out of my head before ever they can settle there.

Don't read a newspaper and don't read anything but a book and it is The Book. Walk in Coedpoeth park with her and throw old bread crumbs to dirty sparrows.

Sunday morning to Gomer Ellis's place, and Sunday afternoon to listen to Mr Humphreys reading, and asking us to answer his questions, and Sunday evening again to Gomer Ellis's place, and again close by Mam in a front seat.

And Gomer Ellis's place is full of miners like dad, and mothers like Mam, and their sons close to their sides.

Come home with Mam by side streets and listen to her talking.

'Work hard and well and you will do well in a mine.'

'Go to Gomer Ellis's Mission House and the Word will be on your side.'

'And you will be happy. And will grow up a shining son for your mam and dad.'

'Don't go off to strange places.'

'Do not look at girls. All are wicked.'

'Walk quickly past those bright places, not for boys, but for men who are tired and like something to cool their throats after a day down in that country, and hearing themselves laugh, which is fresh air any time after that black stuff in your lungs.'

'Don't dare think of a sea.'

'Take no notice of that Mr Humphreys. The things he says are out of a clever old head that is no use in one like your's which is not.'

'Yes Mam. Then am I always going down the ladders and coming up them, and down in the iron cage on wheels and back again and every day always?'

'Always,' Mam said.

I said nothing. I just said Nos da Mam and I went up to my room. And there I thought about it.'

Turning more pages in an old exercise book, I know he did. And worked in a mine at Llay many a day after that, and I wonder if he still heard a wave break down in that deep, and if he ever saw a tall mast sail by his window. And if he ever ran to John Humphrey and asked him questions again about a sea.

'And one day I was sitting eating out of my tin and by myself in the dark which I like, when a man came up to me and he took my hand, and he said, 'here son' and I came to him.

'Something has happened bad to your old dad, Olfyr' and I was crying even before I knew it.

'A stone has fallen on his head and has killed him, and there

are others too, but their names are not known. I am your boss, and I tell you to go to the cage at once, and go up, and run home quickly to your Mam and sit by her close for she will want you that much. 'Now go' he said, and I went. And they brought dad in. And I saw him. And I went up to my room and I was sad there. Then Mam called out 'come down, here is Mr Ellis.'

I went down then. I heard two men at screws in the parlour. Mr Ellis had his eyes tight shut, his hands on mother's shoulders, he was speaking words but I did not understand them. I sat down and waited for him to finish. He came to me then. He spoke.

'Now you are a man, Olfyr Parry.'

'Yes Mr Ellis, sir.'

'Now you will work hard for your mother.'

'Yes, Mr Ellis.'

'And be brave and remember your father for he was a fine man.'

'Yes Mr Ellis.'

And Mam cried then.

Then he went away and he cried to my mother, 'God look to you, my dear, I will be back tomorrow.' And to me he said, 'stand up there, comfort your mother.' So I stood by her and I cried with her which was the best thing to do at that time, for Mam and I were very sad then.'

WHAT DAD WANTED

'Work at Llay all the days of a week, and Mr Gomer Ellis's chapel on all Sundays. Enough to eat, and a coat to wear for his back, and strong boots. And tea, and beer at the bright places, where I heard he was always laughing and sometimes singing. And I've heard him come home late and singing

then, and knocking against the dresser and the table, and I heard Mam say, 'get to bed, monster,' but after a while when he was gone up, I would hear her laugh out of her, and once I stole down the stairs and peeped at her as she was clearing the table and she was talking to herself. 'A nice old monster is Huw, God look to him, he works hard for his money, and no lazy bone in *his* body, and I like going with him of a night time for he laughs then, and such a lovely laughing, laughs all the way up and down him. Takes what he likes and I will not begrudge it. Because he is good in all ways, and never forgets the Words in the Book.'

Wanted nothing to come to him except those things which were rightly his, and never aimed at anything more because he just wanted going where he had to and back again in all his days and was satisfied in those ways and was happy by a fire, and walking in a park with Mam, and read nothing and didn't want anything except what Mam said was right and proper to a miner and that is to mine and go on mining for all his days.'

WHAT I WANTED

To run away quick with one crying man who caught me by a bright place. And he said, 'would you like to come along to a fine ship and see the sea, son?'

To run away to a place and see many ships.

To go to Mr Humphrey's house which is in the middle of five red ones and near by a bridge and to listen to him telling me stories about this sea. To go to a library that is in Ffordd Gweneth and to get all books about seas and ships, and to take them home, and read them in my room. But Mam said No. So I went on going down to that place where Dad was dead by a stone. And there were other boys there, too, and one day I asked them what best they would like to do.

'To go all the way to America' cried Aled Jones.

'To be a policeman at London' said Owen Davies.

'To play for the United, left half, which is my best foot' Tym Powell said.

'And what would you do then, Olfyr Parry?' they asked, and I said 'go to a sea.'

'And that is a far distance from Llay Main' Davies said.

'It is indeed' I said, 'yet I will go.'

'And leave your mam what's not got her husband now?' asked Aled Jones.

'Yes,' I said, I said 'yes.'

'Cruel' cried Owen Davies.

And that was because of the way I said it.

'He's going to run away to a sea' they all said, and they laughed then.

I knew I would, I knew it when they laughed.'

I turned a page in the book. And I wondered if they laughed when they heard that Olfyr Parry had run all the way from that town to the sea, and a girl at one hand, and his box at the other.

* * *

'Today I am seventeen and I am at the mine. When I came home in the evening there was a parcel in bright paper by my plate and it was Mam's present to me. A new book and a new cap to wear going to work. And I thanked her, and after my tea I said I would go for a walk with this on, and I went out. I went through our park and I came out by a bright place there, where sailors are, and I went in. Men laughed when I asked for ale, and laughed again when I drank it and fell down. I was sick then, and they were still laughing. I went away and walked home and it was so cold I shivered.

She was there, waiting.

'What have you been doing?'

'Nothing Mam.'

'Liar!'

And she struck me, and it was the hardest one she had ever struck. And I said nothing, and I did not look at her again. Then she rushed at me, held me.

'Smell!'

'Smell?'

And it was out of my throat in an instant, and she knew where I had been.

And ran upstairs crying, 'and your father was so proud of you, this is the end.'

I went out again. I walked through a town until I came to the country. I like anything green. Often I've seen a girl by a farm door and I've smiled and she smiled, but mother hates all girls, so I do not speak to them. When I came home again she was still at the hob, hunched up, looking at flames.

'Sorry Mam' I said.

'Where have you been again?'

I said to the country.

'Get your supper,' and I got it, then said good-night. And the next morning I was down in the mine.

Mam was standing by the table when I came home again. I had my tea.

'What is locked up in your head?'

'Nothing Mam.'

'I'm sorry I hit you, indeed I am. Please do not remember such a thing,' threw up her hands, 'there's finished with it.' I wasn't remembering that, and it wasn't finished, and I knew what I had to say, and I said it.

'I hate a mine.'

'I will not be in a mine.'

'I will run from that place.'

* * *

Which he did. And as that Gomer Ellis was so fond of saying until the miner drowned, 'eft his mother on the Relief in a public place, and was gone off to Swansea with a girl, he who had only smiled at girls and not spoken to them because his mother hated all girls, and often walked out of a town to the country and sometimes stood by farm doors watching girls work.

But always he was mad about a sea.

Then madder again about a girl he heard of by accident, on his second visit to a bright place, and this time didn't fall down by the alc he held, and while he stood he heard words out of a man's mouth who worked for an English lot far back in the country.

And listened.

Which was the first time he had ever heard that a girl from Llanfair-ym-Maullt was as beautiful as a queen. And that was how he first came by her, and the first hour he saw her something happened to him, and because it happened it was the death of the reeking town, the top rung of the ladder that was thousands of feet long, and the way out. And he took it.

So this was the second dream, and he still clutched hard at the first, and it stayed by him.

The first day he was out of that Llay place he came by the man from Rhos, and this was the man who lifted him off his feet, and had the measure of the ship and her name in gold both ends, which rang like bells in Parry's ear, though it's so long ago I've forgotten the name myself. And over what

is fiery in a glass man and youth vowed to arrive together at the feet of this fine ship. And they did. And in the evening of the same day he poured the same magic down another ear, and had her ready for flight from the English lot within three days, and even when he heard how she had been testing a roaming prophet and a tramp, beat this man to it, and by a cleverness out of his own mind, told her how she must go quickly from that place and leave another on his back.

And she had tested Rhys as well, in an old and rotting hut. And in the end leaned nearer to Parry than to a handsome tramp, for he had the fire that the other lacked, and also that Olwen Hughes could not but be just a little afraid, and that was because this man said that always the Book and the Word in it would lie close to his back.

And if some angel had dropped them wings they could not have flown away quicker than the way they flew that night from the depths of a valley to the rise of a noisy town. Took her to his home, showed her to his mother.

'Going away Mam, in the morning. Going with a man from Rhos.'

And he did, and left her only two photographs, taken very quickly the next morning, and¹ was gone by the strike of eleven on a town clock. Never saw his mother again, nor she him, but always she looked at two photographs on a wall, and then higher to where her husband was, half grave, half smiling, in another one, and even to the end, and to the last minute of it knew which man was finer. Happy in Swansea for a time, and then he sailed away, and dreaming of a child that could not come to a queen turned whore. And after a while that ship came to an Indian ocean, and there he drowned. Calm was the sea that morning, yet the waters roared in his ears.

That Hughes from Llangar came over, and said what he must.

'You will go to a town.'

'You will be transferred from Cilgyn at the earliest possible moment.'

'You have neglected your duty.'

And his voice was lower then.

'I have heard that you spent most of your time in the wrong places.'

'And I have heard why.'

A pause now, and very dramatic he made it.

'Bards are so brilliant today, Jones, that you haven't an earthly chance.'

'And it would have been to your credit to have forgotten an old glory, and it is so old, it is dust.'

'Far better to have tried to be a good policeman tending to the things that must be tended to, and caring about the people of this place, which is your duty by the law.'

'And since you like a noisy town, and one as filthy as the one you hailed from, you may go back there, and it will be their duty, and *my* duty to see that you do the things that are important, and more important than trying to win a crown at an Eisteddfod, which is a short-lived glory any time. For consider. In this world there are people who are

lost, and people who are afraid, people who forget, and some are blind, and some are evil as the day, and those that cannot help themselves. And many children to watch to school and from it, in a town.'

'You must use your feet again which have gone soft in a tiny village, and you must learn to use your head, Jones, and that is the answer out of my mouth after examination of your duty ledger.'

'And not be carried away by the weakest thing in you, which is a sentiment as dangerous as gunpower. I have heard many things.'

'An old tramp is dead, true enough, and we are sorry about it, and his name was a byword in any place in this country, but that is the end of the matter. Other things have to be attended to.'

And sat with his legs stretched out in my sitting-room, and puffed the foulest pipe.

'And I thought it shocking that you should have neglected this matter of the rise in a poor woman's wages that looks after you too well, so 'am told. But no more about that.'

'Bad. Very bad indeed. That is all, Jones. You will receive instructions from a town. Good morning.'

'Good morning, sir' I said, and hardly realised I'd said it. And when the noise of his little car had died away I got up and I knew what I had to do. First I had a walk round my house, upstairs and downstairs.

Then I decided to collect all my own things, separate them from any Government property.

Counted my books in a bookcase and not one missing.

Counted my socks and shirts in the drawers upstairs.

Collected all my boots, and two pairs of Wellingtons.

Into a shed and checked on my bicycle, and on every nail,

and screw, and stick, and stone that is mine, and not Government property, for I will leave nothing here for a new policeman. And I have no intention of being caught sudden and sitting in my socks; so to speak when he turns up in that Hughes's car. I can hear him talk.

'I am come to take over, Constable Jones, and you are for a town.'

That Hughes will gloat, who always had a tiny bit of bile on his tongue.

Collected my coats. Took my five pictures off a wall.

Went through my ledgers.

Went through my note-books, and on a page here and there the shadow of that Llangar woman's dirty paws. who is truthful any time, but has a whining tongue.

I made my own dinner and ate it.

At two o'clock I went out and walked round Cilgyn.

Isn't Rumour the biggest mouth in the world? Of course it is, and I've said it before.

Started by that Huw Ellis who said I was only interested in a tramp's bones.

Rubbish.

I was interested in a man. But long since I think he's dead.

But where and how did he meet the stranger?

That is the thing.

Walked up to a bit of rising ground and looked about me.

Looking at little Cilgyn I was sad about it, for always I have like a shut in, locked away, far away place, that is quiet like a monastery.

Many an evening I've sat by my fire with a book.

Heard many a story at The Mill and the Goat.

Walked out in the fresh morning and shouted 'Hurrah!' inside me, by the very look and peace of the place.

A white sheet was drawn over this land in the dark of night.
Winter grins on a mountain top, stands at ease, indifferent
to anything in this world save what his icy fingers may spell
out.

Spelt the first word and it was Cold, and rolled it down
from the heights on sleeping souls.

Who woke from dreams that were mad or bad and shut
their windows fast.

Who got his breath and smell and bite through a door or a
hole.

Some wiser measured his distance down, and the length
and depth of his sheet, and were ready when he came.

See it with my own eyes on a rising bit of ground.

Chapel locked, and every window shut.

A bit of smoke from a black chimney over that Forge of
Richards, and fortified with timbers one great wall which is
half brick and wood, and bars against that, and even that
great wide door to his fire is shut, and I thought, 'is that man
inside, buried like a nut for the winter?'

I left the rising ground¹ and went for my duty walk around
Cilgyn, and it is only one of a thousand such.

Shut your eyes tightly and it 's like walking on the air.
Not a sound, not a footfall heard. Even wise dogs fast in
their kennels.

Came to that Huw Ellis's place. His big doors are shut.
His windows locked, every nook and crack is sealed. The
ale will be cold tonight. But I will not go there. Huw Ellis
always had Winter's measure.

What is bad has come, what is worse will follow, *and* he
knows it.

Great iron bars against those windows.

Passed the Post Office. More huddled than ever I saw it, and

I don't suppose you would hear that bell on Ynys Seriol this day. And what was strange to me was that nobody looked out through a window and waved at me, and this was always the salute of my day.

Came by Will Evans's shop and his doors shut too. Nor did he look out, and he was standing there sucking a sweet stick of something in his mouth.

Went by the school and through the window saw the children stood up, and singing under that Mr Hopkins's baton. It was a very warm kind of song, just suited to a cold day.

Walked past Mervyn Roberts, old tight mouth I said Good-day, he said nothing, he just walked on.

Then on to Sion House, that Pugh Williams's place.

I rang his bell and he came out.

'Morning, Mr Jones,' but no smile.

I told him I am leaving this place for good.

'Pity' he said, walked back to his house, and shut his door again.

Yesterday something was very lively in my mind.

Today each step I take I tramp it down.

Looked at my watch and it was around three o'clock.

Then quick as quick one light went down and another shone up.

Stood quite still and stared across white fields, beyond them to white wall and that was mountain.

Watched the flight of an owl, eerie, and its shadow too, under the light thrown up from a sea of snow.

Watched two men pass by. Am I seen?

Like wraiths, bent and huddled and sheeted against a mountain blast, and one talked to another.

'It's the end of a tramp.'

'One found on the Bala tops last year with only one boot on,' the other wraith said, as though any two tramps had come from the same mould and bone.

And the moment they passed me by that Rhys stood out before me, on his own two feet, and I saw clean through him. Then the acts in my play seen, the actors known.

Then the great chords out of a harp and the voice speaking. 'One or the other' I thought, 'it will have to be.'

And one form of the man I'd made him, tugged against another.

The key words in my head.

A man with a wound and a cloud upon his head.

A miner in a town.

A scholar in a black leather chair.

A tiger-striped woman in a bright place.

A woman as big as a sixpence in another one.

A giant out of a door in a house of stone.

And ten league boots for a town and the fire in a glass.

A child in the hollow of his hand.

A whore with the angel's face.

A ship stood out in a bay and her formast light is blazing.

An old man on a hill, and the Book laid out before him.

And on another's back when he went down.

A gun in the rat's home and it had not been fired.

A head like Christ over a hedge one night.

And a dirty tramp in the morning.

'Dead a tramp may be' I thought, 'but next year he will stand on two feet in a place called Newtown.'

I walked on through Cilgyn.

And as I walked I blasted in my mind.

That Huw Ellis who spread the rumour that a lost tramp was a number in my ledger.

A dead one fashion me a crown from his bones.
Blasted Mervyn Roberts, Ifor Quarry, and Mrs B. Prothero.
That Llangar Hughes, and Gomer Ellis after him. .
I stood by the church clock and counted every stroke it made.
Five o'clock. I went home and I had my tea.
I lit my pipe afterwards and sat to a fire, and all the time
a tramp was living in my head.

* * *

My pipe went out. I let it drop. The book after it. I couldn't read. And again I went out.

Darker now, and you can feel the silence with your very hand. Walked way up past the school, over the whitened bridge, up by Roberts's holding, and came upon a herd of cows stood by for milking, and crowded to a gate. Their very breath was sweet on a winter air.

Heard Roberts's son humming low but could not see him, lost in the warm darkness of a cow's home.

Walked on past there, then turned sharp left and so down past five cottages that are frozen grey shapes and no more than that. What blew white from the mountain is blowing still, and soon will heap to old walls. A light showing in one cottage as I passed. And a hand drawing curtains as I go by, and a ray of light as sharp as a knife dies in the snow. Past the cottage that is waiting for Moscow to open its mouth.

Past Iolo's grandmother's place, whose world is a chair, and a fire, and a Book.

Past Meurig's place and no light there yet, he is so mean, just like that Top Holding man.

Past the house of a dwarf, and of his mother and of the son, and Idris doing homework at a table, the yellow light on his

hair, and his father doubled in a chair, and his mother knitting.

Past where little Arianwen lives and singing as I went by, and so brightly it might be the first morning of the world. Who long ago forgot an old tramp who once gave her a live blackbird for a pet.

Past all these places and the doors closed.

A yellow jug will hang on a dresser.

And a quarryman's feet lie easy on a hob.

Mrs Vaughan will make black tea.

Meurig's mother will make that Café au lait.

Ale is too cold tonight.

And others thought so too, for as I came round the back of the Mill and the Goat I passed the first bright window in this place, which was so lighted up I could see that Huw Ellis cosy to a fire and Olwen reading to him, and in so loud a voice I knew what it was, and knew better when she laughed. For I knew she had "o Law o Law" out of a library on wheels this Friday, and I'm sure it was warmer than Huw Ellis's ale.

Down past Trevor Powell's doll's houses, and in this hard light and this searing air you may almost see the thinness of their bones, which is the measure of meanness in a builder, and pitiful they looked indeed. Jerry built and good for five years only.

And here is the Station-House, and was my home from the day I was transferred from a noisy bloody town to the quietness of Cilgyn.

Tomorrow, or perhaps the next day, or the next after that, for the law is not always certain of itself, I will be gone from this place and I know I will do three things when I drop from a green bus in a town.

Call on that old Sir Flook.

Visit Mrs Parry's grave.

Dodge the Moreby Martyr.

As high as ever I go will be Inspector, and that will be enough.

Never wanted much. Never set myself on marrying.

Like a book in my hand, like coming on a new word, or a very old one. And I like to work out in my mind how far a word will go, how deep, or how high it can climb.

Like a child surprising me with the lamp in my hand, as I go on my way from shop to shop, and trying the locks on those doors, and the child chattering about everything and anything all in a moment as we go on our way, who is coming back from choir practice or a visit to her aunt.

I like that Mr Hopkins and I like his view of the world.

Who hates causes and pilgrimages and crusades and once said that they be-devil men.

Likes all movements that are towards the heart.

Though I have no doubt that if ever his own is opened it will be full of words. For as I said before that Hopkins man is a god with them.

How many will say good-bye when the policeman from the town turns up?

I shall not count.

The snow drives down and down and will not stop.

And wind cavorts down the mountain's back.

I came by my house again, and I stood on the step, listening, and watching, and in the end, wondering. And then I went in.

The book was flat on its back, the pipe near the bars, and the grate gone black.

At ten o'clock I went up to my bed.

I lay for a long time and I thought about the morning.
And a tramp fell heavy as a stone to the bottom of my mind.
Heard the clock strike eleven. And twelve.
And the sound drowned in another sound.
And the wind has fingers tearing at every door, at every
window in the place, at any hole at all that might be found.
Cilgyn is fast to its bed, and wrapped and wrapped around.
The feet of sheep will make figures of eight in many a field.
Its life is its open mouth in any cold season, and what blows
in.
A pigeon under my window, cuddled on a frozen twig.
I look out through a frosted window and there is the most
naked morning I have ever seen.
My eye closed on the sight of a clock saying half past twelve
in the morning.
And opened to the loudest shout that ever man heard the
mountain round.
And I knew it was a sign, for I knew what that sound was.
And I was up and out of that house in less than thirty seconds
and that is pretty quick.
The shouts was sheets rolled back and doors wide, and win-
dows down.

He put cupped hands to his mouth, and Death came out of it.

'Wedi i ffeindo!'

'Wedi i ffeindo!'

And the sound rolled downwards like an iron ball.

And the very air was tinkling like a bell.

And the doors of The Mill and the Goat thrown wide to the blast.

And that Huw Ellis plunging in the snow, then suddenly anchored in a road, and snow above his knees.

'Hello! Hello! Hello!'

'Selwyn!'

And another iron ball rolled down on Huw.

'Hell—o!'

'Marw!'

'Hell—o!'

Selwyn. Calling! Found. Marw. Marw.'

'Who? Who?'

'Rhys the Wound.'

'Duw! That tramp is found.'

And by that Selwyn, too.

Came belted, and spurred, and crowned for the job he had to do.

And told it to Huw Ellis around six of the clock.

Who said, 'Indeed! man, that will be hard goin' beyond the Hengoed farm.'

'It will indeed.'

And Selwyn shook his shoulders.

'Want help? Want lamps, Selwyn?'

'I have them.'

'A hot drink for you, man. God, this is a night Hard gom' I say.'

'I must get me there, drive back my sheep'

'Indeed. Else they may drown in snow.'

'Empty my bloody pocket, too' that Selwyn said.

For sheep were life to him, in a high cold corner of the world

'There man' Huw said, and that ruin was boiling

'Dinolch, Huw.'

And Ellis watched him go out and climb towards the Hengoed farm

Looked at his weather-glass and saw this fallen down, and would go no further.

'Damn!'

'Marw!'

'That Rhys.'

'Found.'

'Marw'

From one mouth to another mouth, and like whips across the snow.

And still the ball rolled down.

'Weddi fferdo!'

'Hello! Hello!'

'Marw! Marw!'

Doors opened and banged, and windows down, and eyes half lost in sleep.

'Found him' cried Meurig. 'Well indeed. The poor man.'
And that man from Sion House out in two minutes in his full black and one big overcoat and standing by Huw Ellis who thought, 'damn! How quick he is. Like a fireman down a pole.'

'Morning Mr Pugh Williams, sir. Sad it is. That man is dead.'

'Pity! Pity! But now he's known.

They ran, and feet were running after.

'Hello!' Pugh Williams called, and it was like the sound out of a funnel that stretched from flat field to mountain top.

'Come up!' cried Selwyn.

'Coming. Coming.'

Goronwy had six legs and five arms as he scrambled upwards, and fell, and fell again, then climbed on up.

'At last. Strange that is. And just before I go.'

'Marw! Marw!'

The sound went circling round and round, yet that Selwyn's mouth was closed.

Who cupped his hands for a shout when his foot struck hard.

And the wind was at his bones.

And the men ran faster and faster.

'Mercy' said Pugh Williams as he drew near.

Then feet were past him, the black shapes climbing fast.

'Hello! Where are you, Selwyn?'

'Hello! Here I am. By here. I will swing my lamp. That man is truly dead.'

'Comin' Selwyn. Comin'.'

And light from swinging lamps made great swathes through the stiffened trees.

'Hello there, Mr Jones' a man cried out, but Goronwy did not answer.

He went on up, and at the height where Selwyn was, humped and hidden in sacks, and cupped hands to his mouth to keep them warm, Goronwy spoke.

'Hello! That you Selwyn Morris?'

'I hope it is' that Selwyn said.

Then Goronwy saw what lay at the bottom of a hole.

'How then was this?'

'Climbin' up here after two ewes, been lost two days, and I was just at the top of this path and I slipped and I was down in an instant and I struck at something and it was hard, and it wasn't snow.'

Then swung his lamp downwards, and under it Goronwy saw the shape of a man.

'Sad indeed' said Selwyn.

'It is.'

'And many thought he had gone out of it forever, and some said he had gone to another country, and some said he had walked far back to Cynant, there to live hard by his mother's bones for the end of his days.'

'And lies here under snow as white as a candle, and as hard as the rock.'

'Rock it is, Mr Jones.'

Then he stood close to Goronwy and they were silent, and both were looking downwards. And up and up came the men, and the lights were swinging in their hands.

'Now what is this?' said one.

'And is this true then?' said another.

And Goronwy said it was.

Then Pugh Williams came.

'Tell Selwyn! How was it' he asked.

And words fell wooden out of a cold mouth, and the same as it was before.

'Comin' up after two of my ewes, which I want for market Wednesday, and another five yet missin'. And I was just at the top of this path which all the way up is ice, and of a sudden I was slidin' down fast, and my foot struck hard. And there he was. Who has been lost for weeks. Dead. Buried.'

'Dig' cried Pugh Williams, when all the men were up. And they dug.

'Faster.'

And they dug faster.

And lay their fingers deep into the hardened snow.

Wind circled round their heads.

'Dig' cried Pugh Williams. 'Faster men.'

And they were digging.

'God Almighty' cried Huw Ellis, as Rhys the Wound came out.

Then held high his lamp and saw the shape break in the deepest snow.

'Gently' said Pugh Williams, 'gently boys.'

'Geraint will cry deeply when he knows' thought Selwyn, as he pulled with them.

And out came a frozen tramp.

First the feet, as bare and clean as bone.

'Pull hard.'

And they pulled hard.

And then the golden chest.

'Poor child' Pugh Williams said, 'that's all he ever was.'

And then the face and the head.

And the living hair.

* * *